

# Developing a Practical Teaching Course at the University Level: Teaching English to Young Learners

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## Abstract

This paper aims at helping teacher trainers at the university level gain insight into the process involved in creating and developing a course for future instructors of children in the area of English language education. It covers the structure of a course called *jidou eigo* (the teaching of English to young learners) from the basic course through the practicum. The paper focuses most heavily on the second part of the course, a class for children, taught at the university by prospective English teachers. While several obstacles were encountered along the way, the author believes that this course would serve as an effective model at any university at which practical teacher training is undertaken. Such courses seem to hold great appeal to the parents of children living in the area, as their children have the opportunity to interact with university students on a frequent basis. As for the university students, they can receive practical training through such a course and hone their teaching skills prior to graduating.

**Keywords:** English for young learners, elementary school English, teacher training, *jidou eigo*, communicative language teaching

## TERMS USED IN THIS PAPER

- Jidou Eigo:* This refers to the Japanese title for the entire three-part course called “Teaching English to Young Learners.”
- Kiso Enshuu:* This is the first part of the course, a one-year introductory class called “An Introduction to Teaching English to Young Learners.”
- Senmon Enshuu:* This is the ensuing part of the course, a one-year practicum in which the university students teach English to local children. This class for children is called *Kodomo no Kyoushitsu* (Kids’ Classroom), which makes up the bulk of the course *Senmon Enshuu*.
- Jidou Eigo Gairon:* This class consists of theory, discussion, and activities designed to help university

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students gain a deeper understanding of what they learned in the two prerequisite classes. In a sense, this class represents a course consolidation.

The students enrolled in the introductory class are sophomores. In their junior year, they may take the next two classes simultaneously, or take either of the classes independent of one another.

## INTRODUCTION

In 2002, Tsukuba Women's University started offering a course called *Jidou Eigo Kiso Enshuu* (An Introduction to Teaching English to Young Learners). It was the professor's hope that the course would train university students to teach children English at a variety of levels, but primarily children at the elementary school level or below. Unlike theory courses, this series of classes was to be strictly practical and aim at preparing the university students to design, organize, plan, implement, and evaluate a course for young learners of English. The course expanded as the students progressed; by 2005, the students were teaching local children in a class called *Senmon Enshuu*, thus putting into practice the approaches and strategies they had learned in *Kiso Enshuu*.

This paper will explore the entire process by which the course was created, from conception to implementation. It aims to examine the conceptual underpinning of the course and the theoretical structure upon which it was created. The latter part of the paper will examine the content of the course through a variety of approaches: The syllabus that was organized for the course, actual lesson plans, and activities will be reviewed for overall effectiveness, in terms of both student instructor and learner.

Did the course succeed in creating able instructors for the future? Though the answer is naturally at the discretion of the reader, it would appear that such courses are helpful to the future non-native English speaking language teacher. As university students, they can experiment at every phase of the creation of a course, and thereafter review the merits and drawbacks of their efforts through discussion and reflection. Contrary to standard teaching courses at the university level, this course aimed to move away from highly theoretical material and focus on the development of practical skills.

## OVERVIEW

### **The Current Situation of Foreign Language Teaching at the Elementary School Level**

Just over a decade ago, the following passage was written in a book published by the Ministry of Education: "While the acquisition of necessary knowledge and skills is quite often emphasized as one of the most important purposes and functions of education in a number of developed countries, the spiritual aspect is more stressed in Japan. Knowledge and skills are, therefore, considered as the second or third concerns and/or something 'vulgar.'" (Okamoto, p. 19)

Such thinking may have been in vogue at a time when such institutions as lifetime employment and *gakureki shakai* (academic meritocracy) still served to support or guide education in this country, but the relationship between compulsory education, higher education, and employment has changed markedly in recent years. As a Course of Study for Foreign Languages has not yet been created for the

elementary school level, the current system of foreign language instruction would appear in need of a more succinct direction. In other words, English cannot be viewed as part of international understanding or as a necessary step in maintaining pace not only with neighboring countries in Asia, but for preparing young people for future language learning. As vulgar as it may seem, English is a skill that needs to be learned at school, not only for academic pursuits, but for communicative purposes.

Language teaching is often criticized from within as stagnant. This quote by a curriculum specialist in a board of education was typical of the times: "In Japan, we tend to teach foreign language as if we were raising a nation of foreign scholars. This is how we taught during the Meiji period." (Juppe, 2000, p. 87) However, the Ministry of Education would appear to have shifted its focus as well: "Elementary school students are keenly interested in new things and are at a stage where they can naturally absorb other cultures through language and other means. Exposure to English during these years is extremely important not only for developing communicative ability but also for deepening international understanding." (Kageura, p. 123)

Referring to the preceding quotation, it would seem that teachers will need to teach language more communicatively from now on with an emphasis on practical use. Rather than have foreign teachers serve as the sole conduits of language practice, it will be beneficial to train a generation of instructors competent in English, who can communicate with pupils in the target language without fear of seeming strange or sociolinguistically contradictory, which many teachers view as an obstacle in teaching English communicatively.

Peter Medgyes postulated that non-NESTs (non-native English speaking teachers) provide the following benefits in teaching a foreign language: "(They...) 1. Provide a better learner model. 2. Teach language learning strategies more effectively. 3. Supply more information about the English language. 4. Better anticipate and prevent language difficulties. 5. Are more sensitive to their students. 6. Benefit from their ability to use the students' mother tongue." (Medgyes, in Celce-Murcia, p. 436) Without elaborating on these, it can be said that a well-trained non-NEST is invariably more effective in teaching language both as a formal system and for purposes of communication. "The teaching of use... does seem to guarantee the learning of usage since the latter is represented as a necessary part of the former." (Widdowson, p. 19)

Up until now, *eikaiwa* and English seem to have been treated as separate phenomena. *Eikaiwa*, or English for communication, is often looked upon as frivolous. In a sense, it has been treated much like a hobby or a pastime one uses for traveling, for watching films, etc. English, on the other hand, is seen as connected strongly to academic skills. Therefore, teachers tend to neglect communication and focus on English that will help students pass difficult entrance examinations. This requires concentrating on grammar and structural English; hence, at virtually every level of secondary education, it can be said that teachers are trying to raise a nation of scholars. This upholds the assertions made earlier by both Okamoto and the curriculum specialist from Aomori Prefecture.

In 2006, the University of Tokyo's School of Engineering introduced a course in English for its students. The aim is to make the university an international research center. Kwansai Gakuin University holds a five-day camp in English to combine technology and English. In principle, no one is allowed to use Japanese, the aim being, of course, that scientists gain a good command of English so

that they can work internationally. (Shinichiro Noguchi, p. 28) Years ago, it was thought that language skills would be acquired at the professional level by those who needed them. Today, in an environment of ever-changing jobs and careers, it is necessary that professionals come into their working lives with language skills. School would be the ideal place to master such skills.

Regardless of whether one dismisses ideas supportive of the sensitive period, or the biological period during which children are thought to have an easier time learning foreign language, (Hatta, p. 15) or the critical period, the time from birth until the age of seven, when children are thought to be “sponges”, it would seem that from a variety of standpoints, learning an internationally used language is important from an early stage. This would most logically be English, as it is the world’s most widely spoken language.

Such a development will require instructors in various institutions. Since it appears to be a growing area in the job market and teaching English seems to be an appealing area of study for young people, it makes sense to develop a university course that prepares them for such an undertaking. If university students can graduate with the necessary skills to start teaching immediately and effectively with little to no training, then such a course would be of high practical value to the students, society, and education.

It is with this overview in mind that such a course was created for the university students at Tsukuba Gakuin University.

## PLANNING THE COURSE

### Setting the Objectives

Initially, setting objectives for the course was necessary. Since *Kiso Enshuu* was to serve as the introductory class in the course, it had to satisfy several objectives for the university students taking the course:

1. Instill in the students an interest in teaching by appealing to creative skills.
2. Help the students appreciate the processes by which syllabi, activities, and materials are created for the course. This was done largely during the second part of the *Kiso Enshuu* course when students had the opportunity to engage in micro-teaching.
3. Introduce students to teaching approaches with which they have had little contact (e.g., the communicative approach, the direct method, etc.), all of which would lead to an appreciation for the eclectic approach, which is defined as “teachers who do not subscribe to a distinct language approach nor do they base their philosophy on a named psychological or linguistic theory.” (Stern, p. 29) By doing so, it is hoped that the students at Tsukuba Gakuin University could contribute to a future generation of teachers that chooses willingly to disengage slowly from inflexible approaches such as grammar translation, *yakudoku*, and team-teaching practices such as “traditional team-teaching, whereby a Japanese teacher and a foreign assistant do little more than read text pages with students orally, repeat new words, and check comprehension with routinely consistent strategies such as “true-false questions.” (Juppe, 1998, p. 5) In other words, the course aims to develop well-rounded “non-NEST” instructors free of bias toward any particular approach. In sec-

ond or foreign language learning theory it has been suggested that giving learners the opportunity for output is just as important as giving them input. (Celce-Murcia, p. 273)

4. Syllabus design is difficult to teach; through practice, however, it can become an acquired skill. Students participate in and observe the development of a course within the course in which they serve as students so that they see a link in the units. Each week, the previous week's activities are discussed so that students understand the objectives and their connection with that week's "mock lesson." (Note that this mock lesson will be elaborated upon in the next section. It refers to a German class taught not for the purpose of learning German, but seeing how teaching techniques are employed.) Thereafter, students have to study examples of syllabus design and create their own for a certain period of time. This experience prepares them for an actual course; interestingly enough, when students prepared their own course for children in *Senmon Enshuu* in the first year, they relied heavily on two successful assignments from the *Kiso Enshuu* class. In other words, their syllabus was comprised mainly of their own ideas with little input from the professor. This demonstrated a certain degree of achievement at this stage. In a third course, *Jidou Eigo Gairon*, (Theory of Teaching English to Young Learners) the university students examined several types of syllabi in detail: A structural syllabus, a notional-functional syllabus, a situational syllabus, a process-oriented syllabus, and finally, a procedural-oriented syllabus. It should be noted that the latter (some hybrid of the two types) was actually used in the course for children, *Kodomo no Kyoushitsu*, in *Senmon Enshuu*. This was done not only because a similar such syllabus was used in the mock German course (in which the university students learned as if they were elementary school students), but because the theoretical underpinning of such a syllabus seems to coincide closely with ideas espoused by Piaget, Bruner, Egan, and Vygotsky, all child psychologists specializing in education. Social experiences, above all, develop cognitive skills; creating a social context through which students can acquire language (somewhat parallel at times to native language acquisition) and express their ideas or produce language, seems to be carried out best through a flexible form of curriculum, one malleable enough to allow changes that reflect evaluation and review.
5. Through the *Kiso Enshuu* course, the university students, as was noted earlier, had to review the previous week's mock German lesson. Often they were given a homework assignment as such: Within a blank lesson plan worksheet, the students would complete a lesson plan from memory AFTER having sat through the lesson as "elementary school students." This enabled students to develop a sense of how activities linked together. In other words, when was it important to review? How often? Which skills (productive/receptive) should be addressed in which sequence? How could games be given objectives so that they not only appealed to children's sense of enjoyment, but accomplished a goal or objective in terms of language learning? Students not only spent time watching activities, but were given paradigms through which to develop their own games and creative activities. This part of the course was essential in instilling in the university students a sense of creativity in the teaching profession. It was hoped that rather than rely on a text and follow it page by page, they would be able to create activities, and thereafter a syllabus, out of their own heads. By binding their hands, so to speak, and not allowing them to follow a text, upon

completion of the course, creating a course with an eclectic framework should be infinitely easier. The students should become adept at using a text combined with their own ideas and activities. The optimal way to achieve this was to work without a text, which is naturally more challenging, but ultimately rewarding, for the teachers, as it develops the ability to create one's own materials, something decidedly lacking in the current teaching force of non-NESTs.

6. As the university students had already studied English for at least seven complete years when they began the course (many of them, of course, had taken English for much longer since they had been enrolled from childhood in *eikaiwa* courses at private schools), it was necessary to create a mock course in which the students could again experience some form of anxiety or affective filter through which navigation would be necessary to become comfortable in learning new material. The filter goes up in the presence of anxiety or low self-confidence or in the absence of motivation. Although most children seem not to have the same anxiety about speaking in a foreign language, an environment in which children feel self-confident, free, and highly motivated is certainly desirable. (Curtain and Pesola, p. 54) For this reason, German was chosen as the language of instruction. The language was perfect in many regards. First, it is a cognate language with English, so just as Japanese students are already familiar with many English words through loan words, *katakana*, and everyday exposure through popular culture and other media forms, German and English share a strong base. Second, German was not offered at Tsukuba Gakuin University as a foreign language. It was unlikely that any student would come into the class with knowledge of German (in fact, not one had ever had any German). Third, as a phonetic language, the students would see how a language could be taught. The students did not receive any written work in the class. Also, they were told never to take notes. In other words, they were to learn as a child would learn or acquire language: largely through the ears and eyes. Later in the year, a unit on phonics was done. In this lesson, the target language was changed to Russian. For several weeks, the students played games and engaged in creative activities that were aimed at easing them into letter recognition. Again, the point of these units was not only to allow the students to see how phonics could be taught but to show them that it actually works. One of the problems teachers encounter in education is a varied level of learning among students, which is especially noticeable during the first year of junior high school. One student may come into the class a true beginner; the boy sitting beside him may be an extremely false beginner, with years of private English conversation school education under his belt. Phonics can be taught creatively so that the false beginner is entertained, challenged, and given a very thorough review. The beginner, on the other hand, not only has fun, but learns the alphabet and more importantly, the sound/letter combinations through such activities. Naturally, the two will stand on uneven ground come the end of the units, but such an approach helps to minimize the gap. Furthermore, it starts students off with excellent reading and pronunciation skills, as well as helps them develop writing skills. Fourth, the instructor felt competent in German and could introduce the students to the direct method and communicative teaching through use of the language. During the lessons, the instructor made it clear that students did not have to produce language unless they wanted to. This greatly reduced the affective filter, another aspect of which students became aware. Even among the uni-

versity students, there were those who had no interest in German and others who wanted to study harder after doing some lessons. There were those who picked up the language easily, as the child's "way" of learning language suited them. Others had great difficulty, as they had become so accustomed to taking notes and studying from written material. All in all, students listened to German for 40-45 minutes each week, often making guesses as to what was being said, which is what makes a language cognitively engaging. For all these reasons, and others, German was an excellent choice for the language of instruction. It helped the students "feel" that they were elementary school students: They played games, colored pictures, sang songs, worked on projects, and picked up language through a variety of processes, approaches, and activities sometimes selected so that certain aspects of the language could be taught and other times selected so that students could learn something about processes or procedures in teaching.

This is an overview of the first part of the *Kiso Enshuu* course with the objectives set for the university students.

### **KISO ENSHUU: The Mock Lessons**

As explained above, the students were told that they would learn German each week for 45 minutes, which is a rather long, but typical, period of learning for an elementary school student. Each week started with a short discussion of the previous week's lesson and a review of the homework. Within 20 minutes, the German lesson began. The last part of the class was used for answering questions, clarifying problems, and assigning homework.

It should be noted that this schedule was not adhered to perfectly. Sometimes, the German lesson ran longer than usual; other times, it was cut short due to a lengthy discussion or activity related to teaching.

The first lesson began with a "pre-activity". Since this was the initial lesson, it was not done in German, but rather in English. As is the case with the children, the professor felt that the first lesson should be completely non-threatening. In this lesson, each student had to choose a German name from a bag. The aim of this activity was two-fold. First and most obvious, it was good for the students to have names in the target language. It would be fun and stimulating as it would serve as their first exposure to sounds in the new language. Also, it would familiarize them with names they would actually hear in the target language. In this sense, the names helped connect the students culturally.

The second reason for choosing the names was grammatical. Since our institution had been a women's university from the outset (until just 2005), all of the students taking the course were women. In order to practice both the masculine and feminine third-person pronouns, it was necessary that some of the women take boys' names and thus become "guys." This was a very enjoyable aspect of the class. In fact, even after one group of students had finished the class, I would still greet one petite female senior as "Bertyl", a somewhat rough-sounding Austrian boy's name. Many of the other students, too, when speaking of her, use this name. It is wonderful that students feel such a connection to their names. One could guess that such a reaction at the elementary school level might create a sense of belonging.



After choosing their names, the students had to complete another activity. Each group of three received a paper with the word “ディズニーランド” (“Disneyland”) written on it in *katakana*. They were then instructed to write as many words as they could connected to the topic. (The activity was done in Japanese.)

By the end of the time limit, each group took their butcher paper (called *mozoshi* in Japanese) to the front of the room and the instructor “scored” it. The representative had to read out the words. Sometimes they were given a point, sometimes not. By the end of the activity, of course, the groups were asked if they had figured out the scoring system. Usually, somebody guesses it (after many incorrect attempts): For every English word they say, they get a point. So even “ビッグサンダーモウンテン” (“Big Thunder Mountain”), written in *katakana*, gets a point while “シンデレラ城” (“Cinderella Jou”) (Cinderella’s Castle) does not. The group with the most “English” words wins the game.

While the students complain that this game is unfair because the rules are not explained to them beforehand, they agree that the point is clear: Japanese kids already know many words in English, thanks to *katakana*, before they start learning English. After this, the professor explains to them how this would be done if they were native speaking children of English starting German. (There are similar activities that can be done.) Also, the students get their first lesson in learning to lower an affective filter. After this lesson, they are ready to start learning German the following week.

### **The Syllabus & Linking Between the Lessons: Starting the German Lessons**

The syllabus flows naturally out of the second lesson, which is actually the first German lesson. It is a self-introduction that introduces a smattering of other subjects, all of which will be picked up on in ensuing weeks with seemingly no logic... Because the syllabus is a hybrid of a task-oriented and a procedure-oriented one with some rough ideas for topics or subject matter. For example, numbers are fairly critical to learn in any language at an early stage. Colors and animals are two good categories as well. Colors are functional; for describing, for explaining, they are always useful. Animals are of interest to most children at the elementary school level. These appeal to kids at all levels of elementary school, though in different ways.

In the first German lesson, the “children” (the university students, in this case) are spoken to in German for the entire lesson, more or less. They quickly catch on that they are supposed to confirm comprehension by speaking to the teacher in English (though admittedly, many use mostly Japanese, creating a muddled, enjoyable hodge-podge of language), or by confirming meaning with a classmate. From time to time during the first lesson, they do produce language, but usually as a group or by volunteering. (Introductions are learned in the first lesson, largely cognitively. The students figure out the lines by following the professor’s lead and then use them in a group drill, which breaks down to an individual drill. Practice is done in pairs.) Numbers, too, are first group-drilled, then a simple game follows with dice, which is essentially a rote practice drill done in game form: Two large, Styrofoam dice, one blue and one red, are used in team configurations. A chant is used when the dice are thrown: “Eins, zwei, drei, WERF!” Though the instructor says this alone at the beginning of the game, by the end, the students who are not “throwers” for that turn chant along. After throwing a die, the student then says the number. The one with the higher number gets a point for that round. In this way, the



numbers from one to six are repeated many times.

By the end of this first lesson, the students become aware of something. First, they can already say several lines and words in German. Their pronunciation is good because like the Audiolingual Method, they spend a great deal of time listening and repeating/using language. Unlike this now largely defunct approach, however, they have context through which they learn. Second, their affective filters have been lowered to a significant extent. The lesson was easy and enjoyable, so they feel little fear of using German. Like young children, they realize that this class is an amoebic mess of language that they have to make sense of like a puzzle. This mirrors the acquisition techniques they unknowingly used as children. For example, their parents did not force them to repeat sentences as infants; the students were allowed to produce language when they felt ready to do so. In this way, language learning mimics language acquisition.

As with the children the professor had actually taught previously at elementary school, the university students had to write *kansoubun* for homework. In this review of the lesson, they will focus on what they understood. Quite naturally, they understand virtually all of the content, which makes them feel somewhat confident, just as it did with elementary school students. Furthermore, they have already begun to notice some of the dynamics of German without having them pointed out. In the following week's discussion, for example, when the professor asked them what they had noticed, someone said that the "v" in "vier" (the number four), sounded like an "f." Someone else noticed that "du" and "Sie" were used for "you." Through examples of usage, the students quickly figured out that one was polite and one form was familiar.

Such remarks are excellent because they indicate that the process is a cognitive one. Students are learning themselves, without having each aspect pointed out to them with careful explanation. Moreover, as future teachers, if they can encourage such behavior in their children, it might serve to further the development of critical thinking, an important skill in the process of socialization and which is doubly important in creating independent learners.

In the next lesson, the syllabus starts to take form. A number of topics have arisen, but first, review and practice will be carried out in each succeeding lesson. In the case of the second German lesson, it focuses on using their names once again and practicing self-introductions. This should be fun and non-threatening, so a "Rock-Paper-Scissors" exercise will be used. In this exercise, students follow a pattern and after introducing themselves, they play *jancken* in German. The winner introduces him or herself to another student, while the loser sits down. This gives each student a chance to practice several times; even the losers will hear the other students practicing around them. This fun activity has all of the benefits of a rote drill without the boring aspects.

This starts the process of repetition. After this lesson, this theme, self-introductions, will be repeated from time to time so that students practice this important unit. This is especially important for children who do not use writing to remember chunks of language. For example, by the fourth lesson, students may be playing *Hund/Katze*, a more practical adaptation of the classic children's chase game, "Duck-Duck-Goose." This game itself actually has little to do with the target dialogue, but the end result is student performance of a self-introduction dialogue.

The activity works in this way: 1. First, students sit in a large circle. Their chairs face out. 2. One

student is “IT.” (This is called the *oni* in Japanese.) “IT” walks around the circle and taps each student on the head, saying, “*Katze, Katze, Katze...*” When “IT” reaches a person and calls that person “*Hund*”, that person stands up and chases “IT” around the circle, running in the opposite direction. 3. The two stop, introduce themselves to each other, and end by shaking hands. Finally, they run past each other and try to reach the empty seat. The one who arrives first may sit down. The other must carry on with the “*Katze, Katze, Katze, Hund...*” chant and touch the students.

This activity combines a chase, a game which children love, and uses the dialogue as the language target. It turns a fun game into a meaningful, purposeful language activity. Finally, “dogs” and “cats” are much more common in everyday life than “ducks” and “geese.” Again, this might be done in the fourth or fifth lesson, when students start forgetting the patterns they have learned, or it could be used earlier. Note that it may have already been several weeks since students used this pattern, so reviewing it might be timely.

In the third lesson, a new unit will be focused upon. Numbers are the most likely theme, and students will learn them up until a certain point. There are numerous fun approaches for practicing and reviewing these; “*Karuta*”, a popular Japanese game, is one. “Slap the Number” is yet another. In this receptive skills-focused game, children race to the board to touch a number. Like *karuta*, students do not have to speak or produce language, but merely reinforce language that they have learned. Bingo is a game that can be used to reinforce receptive skills or students can start calling out the numbers to add a productive-skills focus to it.

The purpose of these activities is to keep elementary children focused on learning, reviewing, and practicing. Bit by bit, their affective filters should lower, and it is hoped that students will become motivated to learn the target language. Naturally the main objective of this process is not to encourage the university students to learn German, but to share practical approaches that they can use when they become teachers. It is hoped that they too will be able to ease children into the learning of English in much the same way.

### **PRACTICUM (in *Kiso Enshuu*)**

In order to give the university students ample time to practice teaching, they are put into pairs or teams for their initial presentations from the first term. Objectives are often connected to the German class. In fact, German lessons may be postponed for weeks if a certain theme is taken up. One such theme was songs.

In this activity, students need to create a song, or adapt one to material that they are learning. In the case of the German class, the first song learned in class was called, “*Wie Heissen Sie?*” (“What Is Your Name?”) The lyrics are basic and dull, but a language teacher will recognize the utility of the song. As the tune is familiar, students can repeat important, useful phrases over and over again. This particular song was based on the popular children’s song, “Bingo.” The lyrics are as follows: “*Wie heissen Sie, Wie heissen Sie, Und wie ist ihr Name? H-A-L-L-O, H-A-L-L-O, H-A-L-L-O, \_\_\_ ist mein Name.*” (In the blank, the student inserts his or her own German name.) (In English: “What’s your name, what’s your name, and what is your name? Hello, Hello, Hello, \_\_\_ is my name.” (NOTE: In German, the song contains two different ways to ask, “What’s your name?”, which is missing in the

English version.)

Students omit a letter each time they repeat the song and clap. By the fifth repetition, they do not spell out HALLO (which is often used when a person answers a telephone in German or as a greeting in some areas of Germany), but rather, clap five times.

The instructor did not think of the song as particularly good or catchy, but he once heard a student- unseen in the hallway- singing the song as she walked along with a friend. This is exactly the aim of a song with a language focus; the student repeats a song and thus practices the lyrics, which is the linguistic aim of the activity: Students learn chunks of language and in the case of this song, practical, useful sentences.

Following this, the university students had to create their own songs. This showed their creative ability to teach some useful dialogue or vocabulary, such as animal names through a song. The main point of the unit is to dissuade the future teachers from using songs that are often borrowed from a native speaker's repertoire and used in language classrooms though the language is often too advanced for or scarcely useful to the language learner. Songs like the "adapted" one we looked at above employ language that the students either know or should know, or can definitely use. It is hoped that students will focus more on developing practical, useful, simplified language for their students in the classroom; songs are one area that could use improvement.

In the second term, an entire unit on songs is taught, which usually lasts two-three weeks. Again, the main idea in this unit is to help the students see a variety of ways in which songs can be changed, created, or simplified to fit their needs.

Another such practicum unit involves creating a game for use in the classroom. Working in pairs or teams again, the students have to create an enjoyable activity or fun game with a purpose or objective for language learning. As was illustrated earlier, "*Katze, Katze, Hund*" is simply a game young children might play to amuse themselves; by adding the exchange of introductions at the end, it shifts from a fun game to a language game with a purpose, which is practicing a dialogue.

The third practicum unit had a cultural dimension to it. Students were given a holiday to cover (again, in pairs or small groups). The groups then had to create an activity or project that would incorporate the main aspects concerning the holiday. Learning more about culture, empathy for other people, and global awareness have all been cited frequently as elements of rationale for the teaching of foreign languages at the elementary school level. (Curtain and Pesola, p. 175) For example, in the German class, the first holiday covered (because it was the first encountered chronologically) was Father's Day. The timing was good for introducing a new set of words: colors.

In this case, the instructor prepared an easy story with pictures, using the names of family members, which students had already learned. As the instructor told the story in German, confirmation was given by the students in English or Japanese. Basically, a son was going to give his father a present on Father's Day, a necktie, and the students had to guess which color was in the box. During the course of the story, students learn the colors in German for the first time, so in a sense, this activity serves to introduce material to them. It also highlights the importance of stories in teaching children. Stories are pure language: telling a story in the foreign language is one of the simplest and richest sources of foreign language input for younger learners. (Ur, p. 289)

Following the story, the instructor told the students (in English) about the history of Father's Day and some of the customs/traditions involved. In this sense, the focus of the lesson was less on language, and more on international understanding. Such stories are good for children, however, because they create "input" for children. At the same time, they often show values or principles that differ from practices in one's own culture. The greater the use of visuals and realia in the story, the better. These aid in comprehension. In the case of this made-up tale about Father's Day, each part of it had an explicit illustration that showed details from the story.

Not every project has to be a story during this practicum unit on cultural events. A unit on stories comes later, in the course called *Jidou Eigo Gairon*. Art projects, such as making greeting cards for the Christmas season or New Year's, are examples of activities done with the class. Connecting with other subjects, or cross-curricular activities, is good for general education. Science, math, music, and geography are examples of subjects to which foreign language activities are well suited. (Making butter was one such activity, since Germans eat a good deal of bread, and butter is both fun and easy to make. Students bring the supplies and then merely follow a set of directions, which is, by the way, one of the language functions set forth in the Japanese Course of Study for Foreign Languages. (MEXT, p. 10) As Curtain and Pesola point out, at later grade levels, geography, culture, and the customs of foreign people become natural areas in which language instruction either contribute, or find its material reinforced. (Curtain and Pesola, p. 271)

Although a detailed discussion of projects is not possible, several were carried out. Making Halloween masks was one such fun activity; naturally, this gave the students the opportunity to review/practice introductions, by introducing themselves as their new character or person, which tethers the project to a language point and gives it contextual significance in a language situation. By October, it had been months since the students had had a chance to use this language again. Because it is such an important unit, repetition and review are crucial over a long period of time.

## FINAL EXAMINATIONS IN KISO ENSHUU

The final examination at the end of the first semester had several objectives. First, it had to show that students had understood why some activities had been carried out. For example, two very simple quizzes had been given in German during the course of the term. Since we had talked about why the tests had been given and why they had been intentionally easy, the students had to explain this (the answer was the development of self-esteem by lowering the affective filter, and thus to help motivate students to become enthusiastic language learners.) Second, the students had to take a typical lesson plan and arrange the activities in logical order, to show that they had mastered the concept of lesson planning. Third, the students had to create their own plan for a lesson, choosing an emphasis and then imagining what kind of activities they would use to teach a 45-minute lesson. In other words, the students had to apply skills they had learned through the German lessons. Naturally, they were not tested on their retention or command of German. Although much time was spent on the lessons, the content was not important; the approaches and procedures for teaching the class were. In other words, what we learned was not important, but how we learned it was.

In the final exam for the year, each student had to create a syllabus for 13 weeks. They were al-

lowed to use any format they liked (they had been introduced to several in the course). Most important was that the students create a syllabus with a logical flow and sound structure. The ability to balance introductory, review, and practice activities was particularly important upon conclusion of the course. As was stated earlier, some of the syllabi drafted in the course were then used in the following year, when the “Kids’ Classroom” started during the *Senmon Enshuu* class.

### **SENMEN ENSHUU: An Overview**

This course was intended as a teaching practicum for the students. The objectives were simple: To organize, teach, and evaluate a 16-week English course for children. The students from *Kiso Enshuu* would become the instructors for the *Senmon Enshuu* course. To take part in this course, it was necessary to have completed *Kiso Enshuu* in the previous school year. Though *Kiso Enshuu* had an enrollment of 11 in 2004-2005, one student decided to drop the course and another mysteriously vanished without taking the final examination. Since three seniors who had completed the *Kiso Enshuu* course two years before expressed an interest in taking part, they were allowed to join the class. These three were also the most experienced of the group, as they had taken the most courses in *Jidou Eigo*.

Preparation for the course involved first creating a flyer that could be sent to nearby elementary schools. The students worked in groups, and three very fine designs were created. Each was used in notifying schools. This first assignment was important because it gave the students the feeling that they were actually creating the course, which they were. In a sense, they were “selling” the course, which was a new experience for most of them.

The results were impressive. Over 80 applicants were received for 20 places. Since it was difficult to select them, rather than a first-come-first-served basis, an age group was chosen. There were exactly 20 eight-year-olds, so this formed the ideal class.

One term would last eight weeks (May 23-July 11, with a special lesson called “Parents’ Day” during which parents could come and observe a lesson). Each lesson was scheduled to start from 3:15 and last until 4:00. From 4:00-4:10, there would be a “snack time.” (The food and drinks were financed by the professor.)

During the four weeks leading up to the inaugural class, the university students reviewed classroom English, discussed and debated topics for their course syllabus, and practiced team-teaching. All of the pairs were required to teach one class prior to the actual course starting; they could choose any theme, but they had to create a lesson plan, teach the class, and after the lesson, review what they had done through class discussion. The other university students had to act as elementary school students. Regrettably, the situation was not very realistic, as the students were already highly proficient in English. Most of the lessons therefore ended in 20-25 minutes, though they had been planned to last 45.

It was decided that on the first day of the actual course, a short ceremony would be held. The parents could receive an explanation of the course and an outline of the topics to be covered. In the middle of the term, they would be able to observe one class, as mentioned earlier. At the end of the term, the parents were requested to complete a questionnaire.

### **EVALUATION: Self-Assessment by the University Student Teachers**

The university students were required each week to write an evaluation of the lessons for homework. The aim of this was not only to review the material taught, but critique the contents and procedures, both positively and negatively. Suggestions were encouraged each week. Most importantly, the students were to judge whether the elementary school children were learning the material well, were attentive, were active, were enjoying the lessons, and were learning communicatively. Naturally, the first is the main objective of the class, as it would be for just about any class. (Ur, p. 220)

Here is a list of the university students' reflections on their own teaching during the first term.

1. We did many different types of activities in the lesson.
2. The children had lots of fun, especially when we played games or drew pictures.
3. We could memorize all of the students' names.
4. We spoke loudly and clearly during the lessons.
5. The students looked really happy when we hung their art work on the walls.
6. The balance of teachers to students is very effective.
7. Stamps, stickers, and masks made them really happy.
8. We could get confidence when we taught.
9. The children could pick up many points in English.
10. Our activities seem to make the children think.

Judging from points 9 and 10, the student-teachers were very satisfied with the progress made in the class. It would appear that the students were active and enjoying the lessons as well, judging from the university student-teachers' viewpoints. In this sense the class could be called successful.

The professor was most impressed with comment # 8. If the students were gaining confidence, then this meant that they were succeeding in their overall objectives, which was to teach the children English communicatively, as well as ready the university student-teachers for their future professions.

The weak points that the student-teachers listed were also instructive. It gave the university students sufficient fodder for discussion and introspection during the first four weeks. Many, on the other hand, were simple points that could be eliminated with slight changes in classroom procedure.

1. Some children were often noisy.
2. Some of the children did not follow directions or listen to us.
3. We used Japanese too often during the lesson and the children noticed it.
4. We couldn't finish the activities we planned.
5. We could not teach the beginners well.
6. We could not prepare our activities well.
7. The songs we did were too difficult for the students.
8. The notebooks (which had been given to the children as "gifts" on the first day of class) were a waste. The students did not have to use them.
9. The magic markers made the desks dirty.
10. We did not make enough rules for the class.

The biggest problem, which is evident through points one, two, and ten, are that the student-teachers lack experience in classroom management. Through case study, however, and reflection, the university students made noticeable improvement in the second term in the way they handled the class. Moreover, this progress was improved upon when the second year of the “Kids’ Classroom” began. In the first lesson, there was a strong emphasis on following rules and a very conscious effort on the part of the student teachers to demonstrate “firm, but friendly” teacher behavior.

Their second biggest concern involved classroom dynamics. Their lessons were too long, their activities often aimed at the children with higher ability level, and the songs were too difficult overall. This, too, reflected an overly critical self-analysis. As beginning teachers, it was only natural that their lesson plans would sometimes come up short or run too long. Also, it is natural for beginning teachers to gravitate toward the more able learners in the class, thus neglecting the slower students. This shortcoming, too, could be rectified over time. (NOTE: In the case of those university teacher-students who took the class for a second time in 2006, they overcame this problem to a great extent.)

It should be pointed out that the songs they used were not necessarily too difficult, but the way in which they used them required more thought. After discussing the issue, the students seemed to understand that with some adjustment, the songs could in fact both motivate and stimulate learning in the classroom. Particularly for students in the early stages of elementary school, songs are a very effective way to encourage repetition and memorization.

### **ASSESSMENT: Parent Evaluation**

The evaluation by the parents helped greatly in boosting the confidence of the student-teachers. For example, over 60% of the parents said that their children were very satisfied with the class, with another 33% saying it was very good. Just one said it was “good.” There were no unsatisfied pupils. This seemed to apply directly to Ur’s list of important criteria in evaluation: Students were clearly enjoying the lessons. As for this question, “How does your child find the level of difficulty of the class?”, 61% of the respondents found it “just right”, with several evaluating it as “too easy.”

It should be noted here that in the information sent to parents about the course, it was clearly stated that beginners were sought for the class. In other words, those who had never learned English before.

It was very clear on the first day that several of the students had been learning English for some time. This response, “too easy”, should not be confused with dissatisfaction. The one boy who answered this way also told his mother that he was enjoying this class much more than his lessons at a private conversation school. This comment pleased the professor greatly: The most important point in our early training had been to create activities that are fun, but which have a definite objective or purpose.

As for additional comments, parents had many. They are ranked according to frequency of response; numbers 4–6 had just one respondent:

### **QUESTION: Is there anything you would like your child to learn in this class?**

1. I want my child to learn everyday conversation.



2. That making mistakes is all right in a foreign language.
3. The fun of learning English.
4. I want my child to master English songs.
5. More communication with outside people other than their family or school.
6. To help my child get over the nervousness of speaking to others.

Clearly, some of the comments focus more on communication rather than English itself. Also, it seems that parents want their children to learn useful language for communication, yet have a good time in doing so.

As was stated elsewhere in this paper already, these two coincide perfectly with the main objective of the class: To create activities that are fun, but which have a purpose.

#### **QUESTION: Do you have any other requests?**

1. I want the teachers to use only English in the class.
2. It would be good to divide the students into real beginners and those with experience.
3. The games are really great, but please speak lots of English in the class.
4. The teachers do not speak loudly enough in the lessons.
5. Thank you for cleaning up the spilled juice.
6. The class should be structured so that every student speaks at least once.
7. The age range should be wider so that my son can join, too.
8. The desks should not be arranged so that the students look at the sides of the room.

It should be noted, first, that the comments on classroom dynamics apply to the lesson conducted on Parents' Day. Comment 8, particularly, is somewhat thought-provoking. The student-teachers arranged the desks to suit their activities; it was not a set seating arrangement.

Comment 1 reflects a hope for immersion. The student-teachers, it should be noted, began using only English in the initial lessons, just as their professor had used mainly German, but they soon realized that there were times when a Japanese explanation was necessary. Unlike the university students, who can use their cognitive skills and logic to make sense of situations, the younger learners had not yet reached this stage of development.

Comment 2 most likely came from parents of those children who abided by the request that only beginners apply. These parents must have been surprised and disappointed to see that some parents had failed to read, or ignored, the instructions given to applicants in promoting the course. The professor, too, wishes to take responsibility for this problem, as he should not have trusted the applicants to follow the rules in a strict sense.

The student-teachers used the comments effectively. From the second term, they tried to think of activities in which each child would have an opportunity to speak. For example, the two main instructors set up "stations" in one lesson, using the other student-teachers as assistants in a lesson focusing on body parts. Each student then had to go from station to station and ask a question to get all of the parts they needed to make a body. This clever activity structure meant that each child had to

ask the same question, substituting the proper part of the body, eight times. It was a good example that these students had mastered the concept of combining customarily dull rote drilling with a creative twist.

Another activity that students used was a variation of the “Rock-Paper-Scissors” exercise. As they had done earlier, they reviewed the introduction process that had been learned months earlier. This time, however, the student had to count numbers and say the noun, singular and plural, that was on the card in a line. If the student lost at rock-paper-scissors, he or she had to start from the beginning again, while the other student moved closer toward the finish line. This game ensured that the students would repeat the nouns drawn on the cards many times and use the numbers. They repeated the dialogue often as well. The children were riveted to this activity. The competitive aspect of it, along with the intensity, made it a perfect exercise. Not one of the students tried to take shortcuts with the English involved in the game because it was such an integral part of the process.

**Q: Do you have any comments on the lesson?**

1. The children are doing well in the lesson, but I feel that they really do not understand.
2. Just by listening to the children, I could not really understand how the class is structured. Having this Parents’ Day was a really good idea.
3. Because the teachers were only students, I was worried at first, but I could see that Mr. Juppe (the professor) is giving lots of advice to the students, so I don’t worry.
4. It was not a hard lesson for other children who learned English before, but for my child, it is hard because he/she never learned English before. Even, “What is this?” is a hard question for him/her. (NOTE: The subject pronoun of the sentence is not known because the feedback was written in Japanese.)

**GENERAL COMMENTS:**

1. I wish I could go see another lesson sometime.
2. The university people all do a great job of looking after our children. Thank you!

Starting with the general comments, it would seem that parents like the idea of having their children spend time in such a program. This might serve to inspire university students in the future. For example, they might try opening and running their own after-school English program upon graduating.

As for seeing other lessons, it is always better to keep the classroom closed off to parents. Their hopes and wishes are often unrealistic and varied, and without knowing it, they can put a great deal of pressure on both their children and the instructors.

It should be pointed out that one boy- we will call him Taku in this paper, though this was not his real name- caused the student-teachers a great deal of concern. In a sense, he was very good for the class because he forced them to think hard about issues of management and discipline.

Week after week, he was disruptive, noisy, and generally speaking, ill-behaved. He presented a further problem because he had learned more English than any other child, probably from the age he could speak. Clearly, he did not belong in the class, but his mother, taking advantage of proximity or

the low cost of the class, decided to enroll him.

For weeks, the student-teachers scolded him mildly or just told him firmly to behave better. He ignored any such suggestions and continued to rampage. The professor did not intervene, as it was up to the students to try different measures with him. The following solutions were discussed:

1. Have a talk with his mother about his behavior. (NOTE: While the professor strongly hinted that this would be a good first step, the student-teachers did not seem to like it. Perhaps because no single student-teacher was in charge, this suggestion was abandoned.)
2. Take him out of the room when he misbehaves.
3. Separate him from the activities. In other words, do not allow him to take part when he behaves badly.

Furthermore, his presence led to a very good lesson on pre-emptive techniques, and also to an improved approach in the following year (i.e., a thorough and firm explanation of rules on the first day.)

In any case, on Parents' Day, not only was Taku very well-behaved, but he raised his hand repeatedly and appeared to be the class whiz. The professor expected this and it is one of the main reasons that he finds Parents' Day such a pointless undertaking; everybody, teachers included, exceed normal performance and behavior, leading to an entirely unrealistic situation. Intended to provide insight for parents into typical classroom undertakings for their children, such lessons often become a well-rehearsed charade that seeks to prevent parents from actually knowing what goes on in the classroom.

As for Comment 1 (the students do not really understand), this reflects the unrealistic expectations of the parents. Since the student-teachers seemed to be following the principles of the Direct Method, or Natural Approach, they did not expect each student to follow perfectly as an individual, but to come to understand over time through collective efforts. Furthermore, by placing little stress on the students and seeking only volunteer responses, the affective filter was low, which seemed to suit the students fine. The parents, however, seemed to think that the students would master chunks of language quickly and that the class would proceed systematically, most likely a reflection of having learned English through grammar translation-like approaches. Furthermore, many parents were baffled by the process/procedure-oriented syllabus. They seemed to expect to see a strictly outlined program of grammatical points or language topics. Again, this reflects unrealistic expectations on the part of the parents.

## FINAL EXAMINATION IN SENMON ENSHUU

The final exam was made up of largely subjective questions designed to get the university students to reflect on the course and how it had been conducted. Their answers in turn reflected high satisfaction with the course. Here are some responses from the exams:

Q1. What did you think about the class? What were the good points/bad points?

- The children want to learn enjoyably and the university students want to become teachers, so the course was good for both of us. The children could come to speak English little by little, too. (NOTE: Similar responses were common to just about every test paper.)
- Every class was different because of the teachers changing. This provided great variety. Because

“Taku” was naughty, however, I tended to ignore him. I know this is bad, but what should I do? (NOTE: This is a signal to the professor that discipline remains an important subject for the class.)

- It is important that we teach rules to children.
- Sometimes our lesson plans were too difficult for the children, but playing different games was enjoyable.
- This class made me think very hard about the syllabus and the lesson plans.

Q2. Which of the student teachers did you think performed well? Explain.

- (H) always thinks about the lesson plan and activities very carefully.
- They prepared a lot of materials for their lessons. For example, they printed color pictures, prepared a Santa Claus costume, and made cards. (S) was always very kind to every student.
- Their lessons were very good. The students always looked very attentive. (NOTE: The same three people were praised in this way throughout the exam responses. They worked together as a team.)

Q5. Anything you would like to say is fine! (NOTE: The students were told that they could write critical comments for this question, positive or otherwise.)

- This class benefited me. Making the lesson plan was hard, but it made my brain bubble with new ideas.
- I learned that making instructions clear for children is very important.
- I learned that teaching kids is very hard and laborious.
- I found that classroom English, such as “Make a line!”, “Raise your hands!”, and “Repeat after me!” were very important.
- At the beginning of the class, I was so nervous, but gradually, I grew accustomed to teaching and I could gain new skills. For example, using children’s books and making games. (NOTE: This was done in the GAIRON class.)
- I saw the fact that some kids could understand and other kids could not. And I was able to understand that an elementary school teacher’s job is hard. But I was also able to feel that being a teacher is a great job.

It would seem that teaching children practically at the university level helps prepare university students for the future. They learned important aspects of preparing for and executing lessons. Also, most of them realized the importance of studying more in the future to help prepare them for discipline problems (e.g., child psychology), classroom management, and methodology.

At the end of a successful second semester, the students decided to hold an extra class, a “Christmas Party.” Every student and student-teacher attended.

### **JIDOU EIGO GAIRON (*Theory of Teaching English to Young Learners*)**

In this class, students focused more on practical skill development from a theoretical point of view. Each unit focused on developing a different skill that the university students could use not only in teaching young children, but in teaching older ones as well. Therefore, the name of the course is al-

most deceiving. “Applied Theory in Teaching” might have been a more appropriate title for the course.

In the first unit, teaching methodology was reviewed. Students participated in a French lesson taught through the Audio Lingual Method. By doing a short lesson, they got a better idea of how the method worked instead of just reading about it (which they had done for homework earlier).

The next three units focused on practical applications: Class activities for developing communicative competence, pair work for developing communicative competence, and group work for developing communicative competence. Each was examined from a theoretical viewpoint, and thereafter exercised. In each lesson, the professor introduced a number of activities. Afterwards, each activity was analyzed for its communicative effectiveness. In other words, what did this activity aim to accomplish? What learners’ level would it be suitable for? How could it be altered so that it applied to other learners’ levels?

One example was the German telephone game. In this activity, the students were divided into two teams and given a telephone number. A phone was placed in the center of the room. As the teacher dialed the number, he read out the number. Using a toy phone, he “rang” the other phone. Points were given to the team based on the accuracy of the person responding to the phone call, and the speed with which they picked up the phone.

The students quickly figured out that this activity focused on sharpening listening skills. The theme was numbers. It also included a short dialogue that would be appropriate when answering a telephone in Germany. (This could be called a language function or situation, and of course, it had a cultural dimension to it.) The students enjoyed this activity very much because it simulated a real life situation and it involved tension, or game-like challenge that made the activity more motivational for students. (Ur, p. 281) Most of them agreed that this activity would be suited to any grade level, but that elementary school would be perfect.

At the end of each unit, the students were required to create activities for each format. Unlike the other courses in *Jidou Eigo*, these could be aimed at the grade levels that they found most interesting. In other words, one group might create a pair work activity for third grade elementary school students during the unit on pair work while another might have created an activity for second year junior high students. The age of the target group was not so important in designing the activities; being creative and communicative, however, was critical.

Other units focused on themes that students found important in teaching children: Motivation, discipline, creating stories, and using text/video materials in the class. By the end of this course, it was hoped that the university students would have learned not only how to structure and organize a class for children, but how to manage and create activities for it that would appeal to students, yet fulfill the objectives set initially.

## CONCLUSION

As language courses for young learners become more prevalent both in compulsory education and the private realm, it will be necessary to find skilled, trained graduates to help them start off on the right foot with English. The author believes that the *Jidou Eigo* course outlined above successfully

prepares university students for such an undertaking. One cannot refute that theory classes are vital in the field of teaching children. Naturally, courses in child psychology, theory of education, and so forth are critical in building a well-rounded educator. However, it is equally important that university students graduate with the practical skills necessary to begin teaching. A combination of theory and practical experience, of course, would be the optimal program.

This course has particular appeal to students who dislike a singular diet of theory and who wish to learn practical approaches toward working with children. They acquire some basic skills in a foreign language (German), learn how to teach beginners the alphabet and reading skills (phonics, through Russian, which teaches students to read a foreign alphabet other than English), learn how to create a syllabus that is flexible, malleable, yet functional, master the concept of a well-balanced lesson plan, and receive 16 weeks of practical experience with real children.

Not long ago, English was referred to not as a skill, but as a subject that was part of a larger educational aim, the cultivation of *kokoro*, or educating children for the benefit of the nation. Few would argue in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century that most nations, due to a slew of factors, cannot promise secure futures for their citizens. Rather, students will need to acquire skills that will help them compete in a global economy that relies increasingly heavily on service industry positions. English will be one vital skill needed to compete in this unpredictable, global economy from within Japan.

At the elementary school level, teachers can continue to motivate students by lowering the affective filters that are often raised high at the junior high school level. On the other hand, they can start focusing on developing basic skills, both functional and grammatical, in young learners. From junior high school, these skills can either be built upon in students whose interest in English is high, or they can be abandoned for alternative skills. This might prove an ideal direction for foreign language education in Japan.

Finally, it should not be concluded from this paper that strong emphasis needs to be diverted to speaking and listening skills. As Henry Widdowson once wrote, language requires a balance of skills. While a communicative grounding is important, one cannot forget that a formal system, a grammatical system, is vital in learning a language properly. Teachers therefore need to focus on a sound knowledge of grammar and strong skills in both reading and writing in order to develop well-rounded students. (Stern, p. 178-79)

Universities can, within four years, prepare their students to start the elementary school children of Japan on a positive, well-developed road to English. If skillful, motivated teachers are prepared for the profession, English could be quite successfully offered as an elective subject from junior high school. This would create a nation of high school graduates equipped with at least language skills, and enable some of them to compete in job markets of the future that deal with both internal and external internationalization.

The alternative is not very promising. Playing with English at the elementary school level, and then diving headfirst into *juken* English with a strong emphasis on entering university- especially in a system whose competitiveness has eroded due to changing demographics- is likely to create a consistently weak generation of language learners. Furthermore, in a non-streamed educational environment, the current system threatens to continue creating large groups of "lost learners", a natural

phenomenon when the compulsory system in place is followed. In other words, beginners will quickly fall behind as junior high school teachers scale their lessons toward the middle to upper middle level learner. The more a student has learned English prior to entering junior high school, the more likely it will be that the teacher gears the class toward that student's level. From the outset, beginners will find themselves lost and falling further behind. Without a base of basic skills, these students will be unable to keep up with the pace of examination oriented English at high school... thus landing them in "remedial" courses at university, classes that were not supposed to engage in such learning, but do so by default. (Note, too, that these courses will not be called remedial, but the content will gravitate toward the remedial as a result of the instructor's intention of creating a syllabus to match the level of the students.)

If the structure of language teaching will not change, then it is up to teachers to pursue reform on their own. Courses such as the one outlined above will equip university students with the necessary skills to succeed in such an environment. Furthermore, such practical training at the university level should reduce the burden on the political and business spheres, both of which can no longer pledge lifetime or even long-term employment to the nation's youth.

It would appear that the days of lifelong employment in a production-oriented company in Japan are indeed history. Universities have to shift to prepare the young for careers that aid the nation by helping the young to find career possibilities for themselves. *Jidou Eigo* is one such area of promise.

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