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# A Manual for the Training of Short Term English Teachers as Required by Small-Scale Schools in Japan

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**A Manual for the Training of  
Short Term English Teachers  
as Required by Small-Scale Schools in Japan**

by  
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Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the  
Master of Arts in Teaching degree  
at the School for International Training,  
Brattleboro, Vermont

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## ABSTRACT

This paper examines the business conditions facing small-scale English conversation schools in the increasingly competitive Japanese market. It looks at their staffing requirements and current training methods and then endeavours to develop an effective training programme that can be operated within the limited resources available to these schools. The intention is to provide new staff coming from non-teaching backgrounds a practical introduction to the realities of teaching through a two-week period of observation, team teaching and supervised solo teaching followed by two months of directed study on classroom management and methodology. This allows for a gradual assumption of responsibility for classes, latitude for trial and error in the learning process and the passing on of accumulated knowledge. Training is supported by a manual, which recognises the beginner teacher's lack of experience and attempts to introduce basic teaching techniques along with the rationale for their use as simply and succinctly as possible. Emphasis is placed on understanding why things happen in the classroom so that trainees will learn to problem solve by themselves and recognise that reflection upon both their successes and failures will enable them to continue improving their standard of teaching. The ultimate aim thereby being to produce "thinking" teachers who value self-development and see it as a necessary on-going process.

Teacher Education  
Teacher Education Programs  
Second Language Instruction  
Teaching Guides

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## **1. Introduction**

Teaching English in Japan has been a rapidly expanding industry over the last thirty years with little or no regulation during this period. As a result the standard of teaching and teacher training varies greatly from school to school. Smaller schools in particular have limited resources to work with and are in need of improved training programmes. By looking at the approach of the larger chain schools it is possible to identify important elements in teacher training and tailor a programme more suited to the small school. Jade's training programme therefore endeavours to create a workable process that addresses both teaching issues and the realities of the small school environment.

### **Background to the Manual**

Japan, with a population of 127 million people, an education system which places great emphasis on English knowledge and an export orientated business sector, presents a huge market for language schools. However this market bears less resemblance to European or American ones than might at first be expected. Educational priorities, cultural differences and isolation have all played roles in creating a particularly Japanese environment for operating within.

English has been regarded primarily as a form of academic exercise, much the same as Latin was viewed in the past, with students spending six

years during junior high school and senior high school amassing huge vocabularies and manipulating archaic grammar forms. All this with the aim of passing ever increasingly pedantic university entrance exams which appear bent on maintaining the hierarchical status of universities rather than assessing true student ability.<sup>1</sup> Fortunately, things are changing with the adoption of a more communicative junior high school syllabus, the planned introduction of English classes at elementary level, the expansion of the Assistant Language Teacher programme and the gradual acceptance of new entrance exam criteria based on the production of language rather than the ability to complete exercises.

Within this environment the English industry has been largely divided into the academic sector represented by state and private schools (including universities and colleges) and the private sector encompassing a multitude of cram schools (*jukus*) and conversation schools. As to be expected both sectors have widely differing agendas, the former being more concerned with maintaining intellectual standards and the latter with generating income. While this may be a simplistic differentiation between the two sectors the financial necessities facing especially the conversation schools are a key factor in both their operation and the style of teaching employed.

As with any private sector market forces reign supreme and both

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<sup>1</sup>Brian J. McVeigh, *Higher Education, Apathy and Post-Meritocracy* available from <http://langue.hyper.chubu.ac.jp/jalt/pub/tlt/01/oct/mcveigh.html>; Internet ; accessed 1 June 2003.



cram schools and conversation schools must remain closely attuned to the needs of their customers. Here the cram schools have an edge, public perception regards them as an invaluable and necessary step on the road to success. Popular teachers gain local and in some cases national fame with their lessons broadcast via video hook-ups to all over the country. (Large University Prep schools like *Toshin Yobiko* base many of their lessons on this system.) Even less famous teachers acquire status above that of high school teachers, for obviously their students' successes are attributed to the juku teacher's specialist knowledge of the entrance exams rather than any input coming from the school system. It is in a way a self-fulfilling prophecy, parents pay extra money for the advantages of specialist tuition and believe that any success is due to these extra lessons alone.

In comparison conversations schools are regarded as more of a luxury. Some students may study for specific purposes and a few parents might be looking at giving the children an edge over their elementary school classmates, but for a majority of students there are less clearly defined reasons for studying English. This however has not hindered an explosive growth in the number of language schools across Japan, with major schools opening several new branches every week. Some estimates suggest that there are more than 8,000 English conversation schools in Japan and that in 1991 these schools made over US\$24 billion.<sup>2</sup> Dormitory suburbs and even tertiary

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<sup>2</sup>Don Best, *Make a Mil-Yen, Teaching English in Japan*, (Berkeley, California: Stone Bridge Press, 1994), 23

level cities (with populations of less than 150,000 people) are now being offered easy access to language tuition. In addition small independent schools are appearing everywhere as acceptance of the importance of English spreads and Japan looks hopefully towards an often-claimed goal of *globalisation*.

It is to these small independent schools that I would like to address this paper. Ever increasing competition is going to be a fact of life and if our businesses are going to continue to succeed we need to look at how best we can provide our services. Gone are the days sixteen years ago when I first ventured into regional Japan where foreign teachers were a rarity and attracted much attention from local children and even adults. It was thought by many that any native speaker could be an English teacher and new untrained teachers like myself were sent into classes with less than two hours observation/training and were left to their own devices to either sink or swim with little or no support. In today's world this should no longer occur!

In my own little corner of Japan, Niihama, a city of 130,000 people there are now no fewer than nine schools where fourteen years ago there was only one. They include branches of two national school chains, two regional schools and five local schools of various sizes. If these figures are representative of Japan as a whole then we're looking at a huge number of small schools beyond the famous names like GEOS, NOVA and ECC. And if we analyse the structures of Niihama's local schools we find that one

employs seven teachers, two employ two teachers, one employs one teacher and one is owner operated. Of these teachers, only one has ESL qualifications and though four of them are experienced primary or high school teachers this still means that eight of them have no formal teacher training of any kind.

This is not surprising given that the Japanese Immigration Department only requires a recognised bachelor's degree, or for nationals of Australia, Canada and New Zealand that they be under 30 and only work part-time<sup>3</sup>. It is in fact official acceptance/recognition that while Japan needs English teachers, any native speaker by virtue of having English as their first language is capable of teaching Japanese students. Then of course there are the financial considerations, with my own school, teachers' salaries make up 55 per cent of my monthly expenses, with housing subsidies, insurance and bonuses added I am looking at 60 per cent of my revenue each month being spent directly on supporting my teachers. Therefore it is no surprise that in my situation I employ three staff without any teacher training. I cannot afford to provide Tokyo level salaries necessary to attract professionally qualified staff nor for that matter to operate induction programmes and on-going teacher training as provided by the national school chains.

My goals therefore, working within financial and time constraints, are

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<sup>3</sup> Japanese Immigration Department web site, available from [http://www.mofa.go.jp/j\\_info/visit/visa/04.html#9](http://www.mofa.go.jp/j_info/visit/visa/04.html#9); Internet; accessed 20<sup>th</sup> February 2003

to provide the best training possible for these staff so that they can meet the needs of a wide range of students and to help them develop an ongoing approach to self development which will hopefully set them on the path to a more professional view of themselves and teaching. I have no delusions as to why most of them are in Japan, a majority are seeking to pay off student loans, others en-route to another goal, for example Japanese fluency for future business careers, or even a few just for the experience of living in Japan. However, they all have the potential to become good teachers. In some ways they even have advantages over those taking the more considered ESL courses in that everything they choose to learn is immediately relevant, and can be applied or modified on an hourly basis to a wide range of students.

The harsh reality though is that once new teachers arrive in Japan they only have between one and two weeks to become acclimatised to the country and their new living surroundings before becoming fully responsible for around 25 hours of contact teaching per week. For those fortunate enough to have been recruited in Australia (my present residence) they will have had more opportunity to talk about teaching and familiarise themselves with some of the teaching materials we use. However all new teachers share the shock of teaching for the first time and coming to terms with the responsibilities it entails.

### **Teacher Training Programmes**

The small scale of most owner-operated English schools in Japan means that training new teachers tends to be a rather haphazard process. Often owner operators have their own busy teaching schedules, which don't allow them to oversee the training process and the task is largely left up to the good intentions of the departing teacher. Narrow profit margins mean that it is not cost effective to pay two teacher's for an extended period of time and training usually consists of a couple of days observation and team teaching followed by the trainee teaching a day or two with limited feedback from their instructor. Often the reality of the situation sees the trainer coasting through the last few days of their contract, more intent on making farewells to students than seriously preparing the new teacher for taking over the classes.

Even those teachers who approach the task seriously are facing a daunting prospect. Most basic *teach and travel* ESL programmes take four weeks and are still only really introductory courses while the various one-week courses that are available have obvious limitations. This presents a virtual *Mission Impossible* for the staff involved in training new teachers who not only have to learn how to teach, but also face the need to come to terms with life in Japan, learning about their environment, familiarising themselves with new material and meeting their students. Given the stressful nature of the situation most trainers opt for a simple approach with one-pattern lesson plans using limited materials, which can be repeated with multiple classes.

Feedback concentrates on confidence building and once the new teacher takes full responsibility for classes they are left to find their own way as everyone shares the same basic working hours and there are few opportunities to observe or be observed by their peers. It is usually only after negative comments about a teacher have been received that extra effort is made to identify weaknesses in teaching and try to rectify them.

The large school chains like NOVA and GEOS with more than 450 schools<sup>4</sup> each nation-wide however have the advantages of scale and can employ centralised training with weekly inductions of new teachers. Even in smaller regional centres NOVA has the personnel freedom to employ dedicated training staff at branch level. Their basic training structure<sup>5</sup> has the following format:

1. Three full days of "On the Job Training" done in a major centre, which includes an introduction to teaching theory (what you do and why you do it), about six classes of teaching practice and feedback sessions.
2. One week of "Observation" done at branch level by the individual trainers assigned to each school. Every class that is observed is followed by a feedback meeting in which the lesson is analysed and goals are set for the next observation."
3. Three weeks of further "Observation" by the individual trainer in the

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<sup>4</sup> GEOS homepage, available from <http://www.geoscareer.com/>; Internet: accessed 15<sup>th</sup> February 2003

<sup>5</sup> Christine Kawamura, NOVA teacher trainer based in Sendai, interviewed by

school. This follows the pattern of the previous observation with the addition of set teaching tasks such as the introduction of a particular grammar point.

4. First "Follow-up Training", a half-day centralised training session that addresses intermediate and advanced lessons, it includes how to use alternative texts and introduces and practices new techniques for higher-level students.

5. "End of Probation Observation", after two months teaching there is a scheduled observation to determine if the teacher has passed probation or if it should be extended. This observation is followed one week later by a feedback session, the delay is to allow the teacher to prepare a self evaluation sheet. At this time goals are set for the next observation.

6. Second "Follow-up Training", a half-day centralised training session follows the completion of the probation period. The teacher is introduced to the Sales aspect of teaching, specifically dealing with prospective students as opposed to students in regular lessons. This training prepares teachers for giving demonstration lessons and doing level checks etc.

7. "Six Month Observation", the same as the end of probation observation.

8. "Ten Month Observation", (end of contract) - same as the six month observation.

9. If a teacher extends for a second contract (and beyond), there are observations twice yearly at six and ten months.

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author, tape recording, Niihama, Japan, 14<sup>th</sup> August 1999

This training approach is often criticised on ESL web sites like Dave Sperling's ESL Page for churning out little automatons who teach the strictly structured Nova way with prescribed lesson plans detailing the order of activities and the time to be spent on each one. It does however introduce trainees to teaching in a phased and controlled manner. Ideas can be outlined and discussed and then followed up with focussed practice and feedback. Once the teachers have been assigned to their schools they have a month's solid support with regular observation and especially for adult classes, teachers need only work from one set text. After a month of familiarising themselves with that book they are introduced to other materials and techniques in a gradual extension of their teaching skills. Once they have had time to master these, sales related skills can be added and the teacher's training is basically complete.

For the teachers involved the whole process has been more orderly and far less stressful (depending on how well they accept observation and feedback) than could ever be possible with a smaller English school. The volume of students can support the expense of extended training and allows new teachers to work from just one text. Clearly, companies like NOVA have developed a successful method for turning inexperienced graduates into teachers. This success does however come at a cost as the lesson style is very structured and there is little room for teachers to develop individual approaches to teaching. Only one set of texts is available for students, namely the New American Streamline series from Oxford, which relies largely



on the Audio Lingual Method. Many NOVA teachers complain that it is outdated though this is far less of an issue than the school's reliance on a single source of materials and just one teaching approach.

This standardisation of teaching works from a business point of view but does raise a number of questions regarding further teacher development and the degree to which the lessons meet the needs of the students and their individual learning styles. A *one size fits all* approach treats teaching as a static endeavour rather than a continually developing process. This raises the danger of teaching becoming an entirely mechanical undertaking, with set pattern lessons repeated one after another. Texts are progressed through and the students proceed along the conveyor belt. However, for the teachers there is little incentive to experiment with new ideas and the lack of variety in texts means that they are not introduced to different approaches or challenged to step outside familiar boundaries. For the students there are few opportunities to influence lesson style or content, if they are happy with a single approach then no problem. However, for those wanting more variety or with special needs they can find themselves locked into lengthy contracts for English lessons which don't really meet their requirements.

Often, the simplest option for small schools, that are seriously concerned about teaching quality and wish to overcome the training dilemma, is to exclusively hire experienced ESL teachers who *only* need to familiarise themselves with the materials being taught. Training is then a more manageable task, which can concentrate on preparing the teacher for

handling Japanese students, their particular idiosyncrasies and the classroom culture they will encounter. It is hoped that such staff are more aware of different teaching styles, bring with them a professional attitude to their work and view personal development as an integral part of their teaching. However there is still no guarantee of success, from our own experience many teachers find the transition from a structured ESL environment to Japan's more casual, less motivated EFL circumstances difficult to adjust to.

### **Jade Training Programme**

- The basic aim of this training programme is to prepare university graduates, with no background in Education courses, for teaching English conversation classes in Japan. It is not intended as an exhaustive study of teaching techniques but rather as a vehicle to introduce practical teaching skills and build awareness of the wider role of the teacher in the classroom. It recognises that new teachers have limited time to come to terms with teaching and at least initially will have to concentrate on survival in the classroom. Once they are comfortable with the daily requirements of teaching they can start to address the more general skills that will aid their progress towards becoming effective teachers.

The programme clearly outlines the role of the training teacher and the expectations placed on the trainee with requirements for both to provide reports on the training process. The purpose here being to ensure that the trainee receives the best training possible and is introduced early on to the

concept of personal reflection. Through the use of self-appraisal and lesson review sheets it is hoped to cultivate a positive attitude towards ongoing evaluation of one's teaching skills. At the same time the reports are intended to afford a clearer picture of the training process to school management and help identify any areas where additional instruction may be required.

Once the trainees have passed the *survival* stage the manual is intended to aid ongoing teacher development by identifying general classroom skills that they must become proficient in. The intention initially is to draw their attention to these skill areas, explain their importance and then later with the support of audio tapes or video cameras and assessment forms have them work independently on improving their command of those skills. Similarly, the manual can be used a starting point for discussion in monthly teacher meetings as part of an ongoing training process.

Additionally, it is hoped that the structure of the programme will help reduce the stress faced by trainees, by first providing them with basic *how to* information that they can leisurely read in advance of their arrival in Japan. Then during their first weeks in the classroom they can concentrate on becoming proficient in these basic aspects of teaching. Their attention can later be directed to general classroom skills. Through personal assessment they can begin to view their teaching objectively and recognise later observation as a learning process rather than a judgement on their ability in the classroom. The assessment forms are intended to guide them towards an awareness of what constitutes *good* teaching and in conjunction with copies

of lesson observation reports give them a better sense of what the school expects of them.

Ultimately, the goal of the programme is to develop thinking skills in the teacher so that they will be able to meet the constantly changing situations in the classroom. If it can instil the view that teaching is a thought process rather than just a collection of mechanical skills then it will have succeeded. As a business Jade requires teachers who are flexible and can meet widely differing demands from students of various ages in often less than perfect teaching conditions. Teachers must remain open to new ideas as represented in the wide range of texts we use and be closely connected to the *here and now* of their present teaching situation. Their ability to respond and act independently to events in their classrooms is critical to the ongoing success of the school given the limited managerial resources available and will also contribute greatly to their sense of accomplishment and enjoyment of teaching.

### **Instructions for Training Teachers**

In addition to regular teaching activities all staff are required to assist with the training of new teachers, particularly the person who will be taking over from them at the end of their contract. It is hoped that during the training period new teachers can be introduced to basic teaching skills and gain an appreciation of what teaching entails. We accept that it is impossible to impart all of the knowledge and experience that has been gathered over

the last one or two years in just a week or so. However, with a good *hands-on* approach it should be possible to pass on the working skills necessary for classes to function while the new teacher develops a better understanding of teaching.

To ensure a smooth and efficient training period some preparation will be necessary, this includes such classroom basics as making certain all the teaching materials have been arranged in an orderly manner and are easily accessible. Management should be informed of any materials or equipment that is incomplete or needs replacing. Brief reports should be written on each class detailing the names of all the students, any useful details about them, the text and support materials they have been using and any previous texts they may have studied. For children's classes it would also be helpful to add a list of games, songs and language skills that the students are familiar with. And as the training period will be fairly intense any farewell activities scheduled for class time should be completed prior to training beginning.

The optimum training period will be two weeks but this cannot be guaranteed, as new arrivals cannot always plan their departures to match our requirements. Sometimes they are not fully aware of how important this time is or they are constricted by the need to give notice at work, fulfil rental agreements or meet family commitments. On other occasions it may just simply be a matter of flight availability into Japan.

The training period should be divided into three, three-day sections depending on the total days available with the first phase being dedicated to

the observation of an experienced teacher at work. Initially the trainee can be allowed to sit back and just watch classes in action, this will be a new experience and they will need time to adjust to the situation and maybe even come to terms with the reality of a different culture, lifestyle and workplace. Undoubtedly the first day will be a bit of a blur for them. From the second day they should start to focus on what is happening in the classroom. This will start with an explanation of the lesson planning process in which the trainer will go over the lesson plans for each class, detailing their aims and the activities to be used. The explanation need not be exhaustive, as the primary intention is to prepare the trainees for effective observation, they need to have an overview of what will happen and be able to label what they are watching. Needless to say, this exposure to lesson plans will aid them later when they must create their own.

At this point it should be noted that the onus is on the training teacher to ensure a wide variety of teaching techniques and materials are employed during the observation phase for they will provide the basis of the new teacher's classroom repertoire. One-pattern classes and repetition of materials will be a serious disservice to the trainee and limit their teaching options when they take over responsibility for the classes. Similarly, the trainee's time in the classroom is specifically for observation and they should not be involved in teaching activities or used as teaching material.

Following the explanation the trainees are to be given lesson observation sheets with copies of each lesson plan attached and be

instructed on how to use the forms. They are to make a chronological record of each lesson, timing every activity, describing what they see and noting the particular language and methods used to introduce them. A brief remark on student responses might also be helpful. These sheets are to serve as reference notes for when the trainees must start preparing their own lessons. All too often details about activities are forgotten in the initial blur of events. At the end of the day's classes the trainer should go over the observation sheets and help fill in any gaps that may have been left out.

In phase two the trainee is to be brought into the lesson planning process and will benefit from actually writing up each plan. The trainer is to explain the reasoning behind the choices they make in deciding what goes into each lesson. Once the lesson plan has been created activities are to be assigned to the trainee and detailed instructions given on what to do. These instructions must cover every minute element of the activity and must be written down by the trainee in a step-by-step format. Do not be afraid to state the obvious as it is often overlooked when the trainee is standing in front of the class. Special attention must be given to the language used in introducing activities, as few trainees are aware of just how complicated our daily language can be for students. Impress upon them the need, especially with children's classes for short, simple, easily understood instructions ("Home books, please" or "Take out your Home books" as opposed to "Could you all please show me your homework.") and the advantages of modelling activities before having the students do them. Care should be taken with the

use of idioms, enunciation and the speed at which the trainee speaks.<sup>6</sup> All activities must be practised before their use in the classroom no matter how straight forward they may appear at first. There are many variables affecting how successful an activity will be with students and so it is important that the trainer prepare the trainee as well as possible. In this respect the situation is similar to those of our students where we should always endeavour to maximise their chances of success.

Initially the trainee should work with the easier or more physical aspects of the lesson so that they can master the mechanics of using flash cards and games and come to terms with their role in the centre of the class. For many, the challenge to their self-consciousness is quite a shock, they must display enthusiasm and confidence in front of the class, keep everyone engaged and succeed in teaching or practising a language point! They should however feel secure in the fact that the trainer is on hand to offer pointers, assist and even take over if they encounter difficulties. The emphasis here, is on introducing them to the realities of teaching and helping them develop proficiency in the skills they need. Following the lesson the trainee should be asked to give their impressions of how the activities went and consider how

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<sup>6</sup> Teacher changeovers represent a particularly risky time for the school as many students use the occasion as a reason to quit classes. Uncertainty over the new teacher and their ability to understand him or her often causes an over reaction. Basically it is a fear of change or a threat to the student's comfort zone. Careful attention should be paid to clear pronunciation, slowing down speech and the use of idioms, this will reduce the shock for the students, make understanding easier and



they could be improved upon. This is the beginning of the process to create *thinking teachers* who can evaluate their own lessons and problem-solve for themselves. The trainer can then provide feedback from their prospective, though it should concentrate on the positive aspects of the trainee's performance with pointers towards future improvements to the activities. All these comments should later be written up by the trainee and added to their observations file.

One question that will be raised during this team teaching period is just how much should be expected of the trainee. This is difficult to judge, as each person will handle the situation differently. Allowances must be made for the busyness of each day's teaching schedule but over the three days the trainee must be introduced to and have a chance to practice a wide range of techniques. More emphasis should be placed on basics skills so that the next stage of training goes as smoothly as possible. It may be best to start gently and increase the tempo as the trainee gains more exposure to the classroom. All going well the trainee should be teaching about half of each class on the second and third day with gaps between each activity to gather their thoughts and prepare for the next.

The third phase sees the trainee take over the teaching role with trainer serving as an adviser in the lesson preparation stage and as an observer in the classroom. By this point the trainee should have a good understanding of what goes into lesson planning, have re-read the training

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contribute to as smooth a changeover as possible.

manual sections regarding lesson planning and begun to read through the teacher manuals that are available for some of the texts. The lesson plans in their Observation File will be of use now as guidelines to follow and the class reports prepared by the trainer prior to the trainee's arrival will provide background details about each class. Also, they will be entering into their second week in the classroom and will be more familiar with the situation and possibly some of the students.

The lesson planning process will begin with the trainee viewing the text and deciding the aim of the lesson, the language to be targeted and the teaching techniques and materials to be used. They should be left to formulate a rough lesson plan, if help is needed they can refer to the lesson plans and guidelines in the manual or the specific teaching text. Once the plan has been mapped out the trainer can give advice on any improvements that may be necessary, particularly in the area of lesson pacing and support materials and games. The trainer however should not end up re-writing the lesson but rather give directions about how best to fine-tune it. With the lesson plan finalised the trainee should create a more detailed *how to teach* lesson plan for themselves. As with the instructions given during the second phase of training, they must be step-by-step accurate, so that the chance of the trainee making mistakes is minimised. The trainee should try to memorise these instructions before the lesson and only glimpse at them during class. Similarly, any white board activities they are going to use should be planned out ahead and checked for ease of understanding. The

final step is to prepare the classroom for teaching, as many classes are taught back to back, it is important that all the materials are arranged close at hand and can be easily stored out of the way during other classes.

During the lesson the trainer's role is to concentrate on observing everything occurring in the classroom, this is not just limited to the trainee's actions, but should also include student responses. At the same time they should be considering why parts of the lesson may be working or failing and how the lesson could best be improved or extended. An observation sheet should detail the time spent on each activity and all their responses to the above points.

Feedback is best given immediately after the lessons while all the details are fresh in everyone's minds. This can present a problem as some classes finish quite late so a degree of flexibility is called for here. Where time allows the trainee should be asked to discuss their feelings about the lesson much the same as was done during team teaching. Good points should be praised, weak points high-lighted and suggestions made for rectifying them. As an observer it is often easy to see possible links, extensions or alternatives for materials being taught, these ideas plus any other lesson related points should be passed on to the trainee and noted on their lesson plan. The most important issue here is for the trainee to identify why parts of their lesson were successful and start applying those factors to their whole lesson. Where time is limited it is best to simply identify the good features of the classes and offer ideas for inclusion in future lessons. The

observation sheet should then be photocopied with one copy going to the trainee and another being sent to the manager for use in the next stage of the training programme.

At the completion of the nine-day training period the trainee should be able to function independently in the classroom, have a sound appreciation of what teaching involves and be prepared for an ongoing process of self assessment. Should there be any question marks against any of these criteria management should be made aware of them.

### **Instructions for Trainee Teachers**

The training programme you are about to begin is centred around an *on the job training* approach, this is because we believe it provides the best method to impart the practical skills that you will need in the classroom and matches the resources of this school. Your training will be divided into three quite distinct stages, the first comprising of about nine days working with an experienced teacher who will introduce teaching materials and methods, explain how to plan lessons and provide feedback on your teaching performance. The second stage will be spread over about eight weeks and will concentrate attention on exploring new materials and awareness of general teaching skills such as classroom management and correction. This will be done with the use of self-assessment forms, video recording of lessons and both general and targeted observation of classes. The final stage will be an ongoing series of monthly teachers' meetings aimed at problem

solving, circulating new ideas and materials and raising interesting themes on ESL teaching. These meetings will be held in the branch schools, involve only a couple of teachers at a time and look towards assisting everyone's continued personal development as teachers.

### **Stage One**

The first stage of training will be spread over about nine days and is aimed at providing the basic skills for new teachers to be able to function independently in the classroom. By the end of this training you will be familiar with the teaching approaches of the main texts your classes use; able to plan lessons for all levels of classes; aware of general teaching concerns; starting to experiment with the store of teaching materials available and developing your own teaching style. This will be a rather intense period, as classroom hours will be more than matched by preparation time and feedback discussions. Plus there will be the challenge of working with your new students. The best preparation for this training is to read through the sections of the training manual which were e-mailed to you.

Chapter Three of the manual details practical teaching skills, which will be of immediate value during Stage One of training. Further information is included in the Appendices regarding lessons plans, useful materials and tips for teachers. The chapter on methodology and classroom management will become more relevant during Stage Two and will be expanded upon using the self-assessment sheets found in the Appendices. The overview of

Approaches, which is also found in the Appendices, is of general interest but will be looked at specifically during on-going training in Stage Three.

The first three days of training are allocated to observation with your first day basically assigned to soaking up the atmosphere of the classes that you are in. This will probably be a new experience for you so this time is to allow you to relax and take in the realities of the classroom. You will undoubtedly have your own preconceptions of what Japanese students are like and how classrooms function. Take the opportunity to check the kind of materials being used and consider the teaching style, particularly the emphasis on communication and participation rather than good old style lecturing at students. You will undoubtedly start to recognise points that have been covered in the training manual.

Days two and three are more focussed, your trainer will go over the lesson plan for each class and briefly explain the reasons for their choice of materials and the order that activities are done in. These explanations are intended to be your first introduction to the concepts of lesson planning but more importantly for now they are going to lay out exactly what will happen in each of the lessons you will be observing. Copies of the lesson plans and Observation sheets will be given to you. The Observation sheets are to be completed for each class that you watch and their purpose is both to give a focus to your observation and provide an accurate record of activities that can be used when you start planning and teaching classes. The trainer will be using this three-day period to introduce you to a wide range of classroom

activities and unless detailed notes are taken it will be easy to forget what you have seen. The actual Observation sheet is quite straight forward to use, fairly detailed descriptions should be entered into each column and anything that is missed can be added when the trainer goes over each sheet with you at the end of the day.

Class Observation Form:

Time: Start/Fin	Activity:	Language used in Activity:	Materials:	Student Response:
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The time details are to aid planning so that you will have a better idea of how long each activity takes. The activity column is to identify and describe each activity. The language column is particularly important as good instructions are crucial to the success of any activity and are often forgotten soon after observation of the lesson. The materials column helps make preparation easier and can assist in the writing up of a lesson's checklist. The student response column is useful for planning the flow of lessons, making allowances for high or low energy activities and identifying the kind of activities students particularly like. Any short cuts in writing up observations will impact later on your ability to prepare and teach lessons so please ensure information gaps are filled in by the trainer.

Phase two of training entails three days of team teaching with the trainer and is meant to gradually introduce trainees to the practical skills of teaching. This will be a period of experimentation punctuated with successes and failures, however the trainer will be on hand to give advice and take

over if necessary. An important objective here is for trainees to start analysing both the positive and negative points of what happens in the classroom. What makes an activity successful can be emulated in others and those factors that contribute to difficulties can be avoided.

In any teaching situation preparation is vitally important and so during this period the trainee will begin to play an active role in lesson planning and will need to prepare themselves fully for the activities they will be teaching. By this point you will have had a couple of days to familiarise yourself with lesson plans and the thought processes behind them, so from now on it will be your responsibility to physically write up each lesson plan. The trainer will still be responsible for the content but will begin asking you for input and will explain their approach to lesson planning in more depth. They will assign a number of different activities in each lesson to you so that you can gain *hands on* experience and start to develop a feel for working with students. Their aim will be to introduce you to a wide range of useful activities, which will form the core of your teaching skills. You will already have seen most of them during your first three days of observation and will have a sense of how they should be done. By referring to your Observation sheets you should be able to create your own teaching plan for the activities you will be doing. Carefully consider the instructions you will use, the need for modelling and the energy levels required. Then write detailed step-by-step instructions to yourself, which leave nothing to chance. Once again, the better prepared you are the higher the probability of success. The



trainer however will go over your ideas and add any details that are needed. Now it is a matter of practising so that you can confidently teach the activity in front of the class. Be sure to check that all the materials you need are at hand and then try your best.

Fortunately for new teachers most of our students will be familiar with the teaching techniques being used, which should make your task a little easier. If problems do occur though the trainer can quickly offer help or move on to the next activity. At the end of the day the trainer will ask you for your impressions of how the teaching went and offer general feedback from their perspective. If you have any specific questions they can be answered and your teaching plans can be reviewed to check how effective they were. Advice should be noted on them so that you can build up a useful teaching file for future reference.

Phase Three of training transfers all classroom responsibility to the trainee with the trainer maintaining an overview of lesson planning and concentrating on providing feedback on lessons. The first six days of your training have covered all the necessary components for these three days of teaching and by now you will be seeing all your classes for the second time. You should be starting to develop an awareness of their levels and a better idea of what you can expect of them.

Lesson planning will present an opportunity to create your own schema for lessons though don't feel pressured to *re-invent the wheel*. Take the basic pattern you have been working with and see how effectively you

can model it yourself, adding in more emphasis on any particular skill area you may have. For the moment it is important to accumulate experience in formulating lesson plans that incorporate the teaching skills you have been working with. Try to vary your approach to encompass as many of them as possible but at the same time take advantage of the presence of the trainer to *test fly* any ideas you may have developed yourself. Refer to the lesson-planning checklist to ensure that your lessons maintain the balance and content required. The trainer will then go over each lesson plan and discuss the choice of materials, the pacing of the lesson and confirm that you have a detailed teaching plan for each activity.

The main task of the trainer however will be to provide focussed feedback for each lesson. They will be using an observation sheet very similar to the one you used during Phase One of training. They will note the time spent on each activity, how you introduced and carried it through, student responses and any extensions to activities or alternative materials that they think would benefit the lesson. Following the day's lessons they will go over each lesson in detail, starting with your impressions of how the lessons went. Again, the emphasis is on you identifying what worked and didn't work in your lessons and recognising what is important for successful teaching. They will highlight your successes and provide advice where needed. This advice should be noted on your original lesson plan so that it can easily be utilised in later lessons.

This period will be one of trial and error so the trainer will not be

looking for perfection in your lessons, rather they will be working on a range of basic skills, which they will endeavour to refine over the three days of observation. They are also interested in the directions you are moving in, are you keeping your students engaged, are you slowing down your speech and using easier language forms, do you listen to the students, are you responding to advice and are you trying to extend your knowledge with each class? These are longer-term development goals but an early appreciation of them now will contribute to your ability to function in the classroom by yourself at the end of your training.

### **Stage Two**

With the completion of the initial nine-day training period the new teacher will take over full responsibility for all their new classes. There will no longer be direct supervision of lessons, however support will be available through teachers based in the same school and via daily contact with the main school in Niihama. Local teachers can be informally asked for help and as they have been through the same experience they should be an invaluable source of advice. For the next two weeks you will be required to e-mail or fax detailed lesson plans to Niihama every day. They need not be as thorough as your lesson plans during training, but they should itemise the steps in each activity and show a clear understanding of the processes involved. The lesson plans will be checked and any advice on the choice of activities and support materials will be faxed to you. If you wish this can be

followed by a brief telephone discussion about the plans. Our only other requirement is that after each day of lessons, you choose one lesson and review it's positive and less positive points. This need not be an academic statement, a note format will be sufficient to show that you have given it attention and serve as the basis for two weekly review meetings on how your teaching is going. Overall, this period is intended to be a time for you to establish your own routines for lesson planning and teaching with minimal interruption from school management. Should you have any problems or difficulties though, please contact us as soon as possible and we will either give advice or arrange for another teacher to come to your lessons and help work through the issues.

By weeks three and four it will no longer be necessary to send lesson plans to Niihama as you should be fairly confident with them now, so instead we would like you to select one game or activity a day for which to write up a detailed teaching plan. These should be new activities you have not used before that will be applicable to a number of classes. Once the lesson has been taught, a review of the activity should be added to the teaching plan, including any fine-tuning it may require. Everything should then be faxed to Niihama and the original added to your teaching file for later reference. This is a rather obvious procedure to ensure that new teachers start accessing the store of support material that is available at each school. There will be further follow-ups during our on-going training process to remind us all that we need to remain open to new ideas and experiment with unfamiliar

materials.

In weeks five and six our emphasis moves towards self-assessment of teaching skills with the use of self-appraisal forms, lesson review sheets and the video recording of lessons. The self-assessment sheets<sup>7</sup> are intended to highlight specific skill areas that teachers should be aware of. They can be used as check sheets when preparing lessons, as review sheets to help analyse teaching skills in general or in conjunction with the video recording of a lesson to target specific classroom skills. They can also be particularly helpful if teachers are encountering any difficulties with classes as the sheets can help identify problem areas and provide suggestions for actions teachers can take. The sheets deal with a range of classroom management skills, some specific teaching skills and the general evaluation of lessons and teaching style. They should be completed on a daily basis with teacher's comments attached and faxed to Niihama the following day. These forms also have the additional purpose of preparing new teachers for the observation of their classes by detailing the areas that observers will be paying particular attention to.

The last phase of stage two, weeks seven and eight will begin with the final self-assessment dealing with presentation skills, which serves as a general evaluation of teaching performance. It is best done in conjunction

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<sup>7</sup> They have been adapted to varying degrees from R. Arends, *Learning to Teach* (New York : McGraw Hill, 1994), pages uncertain, where they were intended to provide guidance for elementary school teachers and appear particularly suited to

with the video recording of a lesson as videos provide the most accurate means of reviewing a class. By watching the video objectively and completing the form honestly, it is possible to build a better understanding of one's strengths and weaknesses and identify the skills that have to be focussed on. This process should be repeated a number of times across the range of classes being taught so that a comprehensive view of the teacher's lessons can be developed. The assessment sheets with reflections attached should be faxed to Niihama but the videos are for the teacher's use alone and should be seen as a personal tool for monitoring and improving teaching abilities.

The final week then is for observation of classes and will take basically the same format as the observation carried out during the last three days of initial training. Over the interim period the new teacher will have had opportunities to refine their lesson planning skills, experiment with new material and work on improving their teaching skills. The observation is therefore intended to see how the teacher is progressing and look at ways to assist them further. It will take either of two forms, targeted observation, where the teacher decides particular skill areas that they want help with, or general observation where the observer comments in less detail on the overall balance of the lesson. Feedback will be given at the end of the lessons along with any advice that might be beneficial and at this point the training period will be over.

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our EFL teaching situation.

### **Stage Three - Ongoing Teacher Development**

With the completion of Stage Two's training the aim of Stage Three switches more towards information sharing and ongoing teacher development. This will be organised at the branch level through monthly teachers' meetings with open formats to allow a wide range of activities and both management and staff input on what should be focussed upon. The primary goals will be problem solving, circulating new ideas and materials and raising awareness of current themes on ESL teaching.

Given the small size of this school and the relative geographical isolation of each branch it is difficult for teachers to share ideas or effectively tap the collective knowledge that we acquire, so the monthly meetings are seen as an efficient means of redressing this situation. New texts and materials can be introduced with feedback from teachers who have trialed them and recommendations on their suitability for our classes. At the same time the meetings can act as a forum for discussion with teachers raising issues or citing problems they are having with classes. Everyone can provide opinions and advice, which can be circulated during the different meetings and followed up by a monthly review sheet to each teacher.

These meetings will also have a more serious training aspect too, as occasionally they will be used to concentrate attention on particular aspects of teaching. For example, part of this manual deals with different approaches to teaching, they have been included for general reference during training up till now and during this stage will be looked at more closely. Teachers will be

asked to choose several approaches over a couple of months, familiarise themselves with them and teach some classes according to the different approaches. After each class the teachers will write up their impressions of the lessons and these will be used as the basis for discussions on the relevance of each approach and their applicability to our teaching situation. The emphasis being on looking at ways to expand our teaching skills and develop our own particular styles of teaching.

In a similar vein, teachers will be introduced to journaling as a means of increasing their awareness of how or why things occur in their classrooms. Reflective writing in a journal allows a more measured view of our teaching, distancing us a little from the immediate daily issues of the classroom and freeing us, hopefully, to examine events with more clarity. It is envisaged that teachers would select an element in their teaching that they are concerned about, list what happens and draw conclusions. Next they would consider the factors that contribute to the success or failure of such an activity and look for responses they can employ in the classroom. From these it may be possible to create your own set of teaching guidelines to explain why circumstances or incidents arise. Often they may even be applicable to other situations or lead to further lines of enquiry.

Depending on scheduling freedom it is also hoped to introduce an element of peer observation and reporting into this period of ongoing training. The aim of observation here however is somewhat different, it is intended more for information sharing, with teachers having the opportunity to see



how someone else approaches the same material or uses a completely unfamiliar text. There are also many techniques that individual teachers develop for handling different situations or materials, some of which don't become obvious until after a class is observed by someone else. This direct sharing of ideas can also be extended to the sharing of solutions with teachers helping each other through observation to solve problems they are having with classes.

Another option will be utilising the Internet as a source of materials or ideas with teachers following their own interests and reporting back anything they find useful. This need not be limited to ESL teaching materials but can include culturally relevant information or any media that can be used in class, especially advanced discussion classes.

## **2. Teaching Manual**

This teaching manual is intended to prepare new teachers for working in a Japanese English conversation classroom so it is important they understand the environment that they are entering. This includes the expectations placed on them by the school and the students as well as an awareness of the kinds of students they will be working with. For teachers coming from a western context it is helpful to appreciate the different educational and cultural backgrounds Japanese students have and how they affect the dynamics of the classroom. Being thus prepared will greatly ease their introduction to the classroom.

### **"Great Expectations"**

I am sure that when Charles Dickens penned this novel he never expected that someone would use the title as the introduction to a manual for training EFL teachers. However, as we embark on this *journey* into EFL teaching I can think of no better explanation of how we feel. I am sure you have expectations of what teaching here will be like. I certainly have expectations of how you will perform and the students undoubtedly have many expectations of what their teacher will be like. Our task now is to endeavour to meet all these expectations!

For the next one to two weeks you will be undergoing on-the-job training with the classes you will be taking over and the teacher that you will

be replacing. In addition you will also have opportunities to watch how other teachers approach their classes. Initially you will spend the first three days or so observing classes, this is to give you an opportunity to see for yourself how the classroom functions and to discuss with the teacher any questions that may be raised through your observation. Then gradually over the next few days you will take over responsibility for a number of activities as you team-teach with the teacher. During this time you will start to take a more active role in lesson preparation and receive assistance and feedback from the teacher. This will introduce you gently to the role of teaching, with the freedom to transfer control of the class back to the teacher at any time you wish. The final three days of your training will see you teaching all your classes with your teacher/trainer being with you to provide assistance in lesson planning as well as feedback regarding each lesson.

We appreciate that during this time you will be asked to digest a great deal of new information and place yourself in a very unfamiliar situation. Therefore, following the completion of your initial on-the-job training we employ a two-month period of *directed study* during which we highlight important areas of teaching and allow new teachers *space* to assimilate all that they have been experiencing. During this period you will be busy familiarising yourself with your students and teaching materials, and undoubtedly you will be left with many unanswered questions. Please feel free to ask the other teachers and myself about anything you wish to know, we have all been in the same situation and understand the difficulties you

face. It will be easier and less stressful to ask for advice or to observe extra classes than to struggle by yourself. Similarly, don't be too concerned about initial lesson quality as we accept that it takes three to six months for new teachers to become fully conversant with the teaching materials and to build up good rapport with their students. Our interest primarily is that new teachers are moving in the right direction rather than that they show immediate mastery of all teaching situations.

Fortunately, the students too tend to share our outlook, they are willing to overlook shortfalls in teaching techniques if they can see that their new teacher is genuinely interested in them, both on a personal level and as English students. In this way conversation classes, especially with adults, occur primarily as a social interaction with language as the conduit for this interaction. If a teacher shows the requisite social skills they will be regarded as a good teacher and if they can teach as well they will be seen as a wonderful teacher. Needless to say I am looking for wonderful teachers.

### **The Japanese Student**

Before embarking on teaching here in Japan it is important to be aware of the general nature of the students you will be encountering. Usually such a generalisation would be regarded as a mere caricature but Japanese society is far more conformist than foreigners might imagine. Education especially is totally regimented, with high school students throughout the nation studying the same lesson on the same day and regulations covering

everything from the style of hair bands to the length of socks<sup>1</sup>. Students progress through a system which aims at producing the highest average level possible, but provides little assistance for those at either end of the scale. There is heavy reliance on rote learning and because of large class sizes any questioning of the teacher is discouraged<sup>2</sup>. Similarly emphasis is placed on accuracy with the expectation that good students will achieve near perfect scores in examinations. This emphasis on accuracy has also contributed to a mind-set that there can only be one correct answer and one way of achieving it.

This all translates into students who are generally reserved and unwilling to take risks, which might reveal weaknesses in their knowledge or attract undue attention to themselves. The positive concept that we can learn through our errors is totally alien to them and will induce paralysis in many students. When you add cultural factors to this equation matters become even more complicated, for example issues of self-esteem take on more importance when you add the Japanese notion of *loss of face* to strongly held hierarchical views based on age, sex, employment, class and

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<sup>1</sup> Shohei Koike, *Understanding Japanese Behaviour*, Chapter Three – Predictable Order in Small Groups or Organizations, available from : <http://www2b.biglobe.ne.jp/shohei/>; Internet; accessed 25 April 2003.

<sup>2</sup> Robert W. Norris, *Raising Students' Consciousness of English Article Usage: A Practical View*, available from: <http://www2.gol.com/users/norris/a-the.html> quotes Dissosway P. (1989) *The Language Teacher*, Incorporating Grammar into University Writing Classes 13-18; Internet; accessed 25 June 2003.

education. And this is no theoretical situation, in company classes students will defer to senior members in the choice of study material or lesson style and will even refrain from answering questions in order not to appear better than another student. Senior staff may have the whole lesson translated word-for-word by eager subordinates who don't want their superiors embarrassed.

This phenomena isn't limited to just companies, adult group classes face the same dynamics. In a particular class you may have an older gentleman who graduated from an elite university and is now retired from a senior management position with one of the old *zaibatsu*, the pre-war super companies that still dominate Japan economically today. He will command the deference of all the other students in the class, be allowed more time to speak and his views will be supported by other class members. Further more, this will just be part of an interlocking web of relationships within the group. If you add a Juku teacher, a house wife whose husband works for a major company, an older self-employed woman and a doctor's daughter, all with varying levels of English competency you can imagine the complication involved.

Fortunately with young students the adage that *kids will be kids* still bears true, they are every bit as boisterous and noisy as children anywhere. However, some differences do apply, small children do appear to have phobias about male teachers, which easily inspire bouts of crying. This may be brought on possibly by limited contact with the outside world in Japan's

new nuclear society where even fathers are unfamiliar figures due to pressures of work and associated company activities. To those of us from stricter family backgrounds there appears to be little parental control with the schools being delegated much of the authority for bringing up children. As these children then grow up the family appears to play a less central role in their development or cognisance for that matter with many children knowing little about other family members<sup>3</sup>. The school and especially club activities take pre-eminence in their world and create for them their own society.

Even Japanese parents recognise that their children are losing social skills despite community organised activities, a combination of affluence and technology is creating children who play together but separately, intent on their Game Boys with interaction limited to the exchange of software cassettes. While Nintendo is making this all possible it is not to blame, for Japan is a changing society which is still coming to terms with its continued urbanisation, the disappearance of extended families and traditions and continued technological advancement<sup>4</sup>. Reduced family sizes have put more

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<sup>3</sup> *Japanese Government policies in Education, Science and Culture*, Section 2 School Education in an Era of Lifelong Learning, Part 3 Re-evaluating the Educational Functions of Schools, Families and Communities; available from: <http://www.mext.go.jp/eky1994/index-5html#ss1.1.2.1.3>; Internet; accessed 25 April 2003.

<sup>4</sup> *Japanese Government policies in Education, Science and Culture*, Section 2 School Education in an Era of Lifelong Learning, Changes in Children's Environment;

pressure on children to perform, both at school and at extra-curricular activities, including not only English classes but also ballet, piano, soroban (abacus), Shuji (calligraphy), swimming, and violin. Many children will be undertaking a combination of these activities and have little time to themselves for play or friendly unregulated interaction with other kids.

Despite realising the cost to their children, parents often make a conscious decision to load their children's free time with "naraí goto", extra studies, in order to keep them busy and out of harms way<sup>5</sup>. While the recent adoption of a five-day school week has aroused a great deal of debate over the reduction of time available to prepare for examinations and sparked strong parent support for longer school hours contrary to the opinions of educators.

As these students become older they enter a world of competitive high school entry where they are ranked individually in their school year and face the unremitting pressure of university entrance exams. Subjects exist only as conduits of cold facts, which have to be regurgitated in an endless series of practice tests and the outside world becomes largely irrelevant<sup>6</sup>.

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available from: <http://www.mext.go.jp/eky1994/index-4.html#ss1.1.1.1/>; Internet; accessed 25 April 2003.

<sup>5</sup> *Japanese Government policies in Education, Science and Culture*, Section 4 Achievement of a Smooth Transition to the Five-day School Week and the Outlook for the Future; available from: <http://www.mext.go.jp/eky1994/index-11.html#ss1.2.4.1>; Internet; accessed 25 April 2003.

<sup>6</sup> Brian J. McVeigh; *Higher Education, Apathy and post-Meritocracy*; available from <http://langue.hyper.chubu.ac.jp/jalt/pub/tlt/01/oct/mcveigh.html>; Internet; accessed 30 April 2003



Occasionally too, the darker side of the Japanese education system can emerge in the English classroom with bullying sometimes requiring swift intervention. Often, over-exuberant junior high school boys are simply being a little too rough with one of their friends/classmates but younger or weaker students can be at risk from older boys who take exception to them. Usually this takes the form of oral abuse and rigging of activities so that the disliked student loses. Unfortunately, the Japanese *sempai/kouhai* system of older students having authority over younger ones in school and club activities is open to abuse with children not being aware of the responsibilities the system brings with it in the adult world. Class members will take the lead of the *alpha student* so it is important to respond quickly and not allow the behaviour to become an accepted feature of the lesson.

The cumulative effect of all these factors is a teaching environment, which bears little similarity to the educational experiences you have partaken in. Younger students can often be quite fragile and as they get older many appear to lack the social skills that promote good communication. Extreme shyness sees students unwilling to speak above a whisper and confidence building is a constant requirement of all lessons. Even with adults, some students will measure themselves against the best person in the class and become disappointed if they cannot perform as well. Warm-up questions like "What did you do in the weekend?" can be seen as invasions of privacy or the teacher pressuring the students to go out and do something interesting that they can talk about in the lesson.

Once adult lessons are underway though the positive influence of the Japanese education system soon becomes evident. Most students have completed six years of English in school and while they may remember their past studies to varying degrees, they all rank as false beginners and collectively as a group have considerable language skills. This knowledge is biased towards grammar and vocabulary rather than speaking but does make the teacher's task considerably easier. In comparison with ESL classes in English speaking countries where literacy among immigrants is often an issue, the Japanese TEFL student has considerable pre-knowledge and is well educated with most having some form of tertiary education and coming from higher socio-economic backgrounds.

In the classroom this translates into learners who are comfortable with text-based study, experienced with solving grammar problems, have fairly good translation skills and are dependent on dictionaries yet are not used to speaking or prepared for close interaction with teachers. Added to this, the insular nature of Japan's history and culture means that there is little awareness of the outside world except for popular tourist destinations like Hawaii. Geographical knowledge is weak and understanding of current social or international issues is limited. In part, this is due to Japan's post-war economic boom, which has created a large, comfortable and complacent middle-class that is perfectly happy with its cosy lifestyle. It is also the result of the importance Japan places on consensus building within society which has served to restrict the expression of personal opinions or

alternative viewpoints and makes spirited discussion or debate difficult.

However, most students respond well to learning in a more open environment that endeavours to make study an enjoyable experience and especially for adults, English classes can provide a welcome escape from the constrictions of Japanese society. There is an image, that English speaking cultures are more direct and open in expressing their views and so there is a willingness to emulate this style. The challenge for teachers is to build on students' language skills and keep them motivated to learn more.

### **3. Teaching in the Japanese English Language**

#### **Classroom**

As teachers prepare to enter the classroom there are a number of basic skill areas that they should become proficient in. The following chapter identifies these and offers advice on how to approach them. Beginning with lesson planning it examines the thought processes behind lesson preparation and the mechanics of putting together a class. From this starting point it continues to look at the basic elements of teaching in a conversation school environment, working with dialogues, free conversation and discussion, improving listening skills and the introduction of more demanding materials for intermediate and advanced students. Problem areas, including how best to deal with grammar and correction are addressed as well as advice on using white boards and specific details for working with children.

#### **Lesson Preparation**

For all new teachers lesson preparation represents the real starting point of their involvement in teaching for while the reading of texts and observation of classes provide guidelines and clarify expectations it is not until this point that the mantle of responsibility falls upon them. Now they must decide what they are going to teach, how it will be taught, which techniques will be used, whether text material needs to be culled, what if any support materials are necessary and even which filler activities should be

prepared as back-up. Attention to details like this should prime the teacher for all classroom eventualities and allow them to enter a classroom with confidence that they are ready for anything and will teach the best lesson possible.

Fortunately, this is not a task that need be done alone as support is available in the form of student information sheets, texts, and shared teacher experience. General data about each student can be accessed from the manager and includes details about their language level, study history, reasons for learning English and interests. Such student profiles allow lessons to be more closely tailored to the needs of the students and can hasten the establishment of good rapport with students. Even more importantly, all classes from beginner to intermediate levels are assigned set texts, which are supported by teaching manuals. This represents a major labour saving for teachers as they are spared the effort of interpreting a curriculum and putting together teaching material. There is still however a need for individual interpretation of the text and an obligation to be totally familiar with it's workings, patterns of presentation and the author's intentions. While this cannot be achieved overnight the presence of other more experienced teachers provides a fast tracking avenue for new staff. Advice on how to use material effectively, which resources best match specific themes, practical techniques and post-mortems of both successful and unsuccessful lessons are all indispensable in the first months of teaching.

When setting about to plan a lesson the first task is to check whether

the unit in the text is appropriate for the level and needs of the students for unfortunately no texts meet all the variables that can occur in the classroom. Many are designed for multicultural teaching environments with approaches and activities which may not always gel with Japanese students, particular activities might be age or gender sensitive, the level of difficulty may not match or quite simply another text might provide a far superior means of covering the same theme. Given these potential difficulties it is important that teachers show initiative and don't feel constrained into following a text that may not always be appropriate for their students. Similarly, teaching manuals only provide guidelines for using these texts and they should not be regarded as gospels demanding obedience. To begin with they provide excellent starting points but as new teachers become more familiar with teaching methodology it is better to plan a lesson independently of manuals and then refer back to them later to see if the lesson can be improved upon. In this way teachers can concentrate on the needs of the students, changing the order in which items are presented, ignoring ill-suited material and controlling practice formats while still having access to an invaluable store of ideas, which can be tapped for use with the text.

The actual formulation of a lesson plan should be a two-part process starting with the teacher's lesson plan, which outlines exactly what will be done in the class. It should be quite detailed listing all activities; providing clear instructions for each one; anticipating problem areas and working in solutions so that they can be prevented or dealt with quickly should they

arise; contain answers to any exercises that may be covered; include clear grammatical explanations with additional examples where necessary; and highlight difficult vocabulary which should be accompanied by simple English explanations. In essence it is a study vehicle for teachers requiring them to be perfectly clear in their own minds what exactly they will be doing when they walk up in front of their class. For new teachers it is all too easy to watch someone else teach and confidently assume that they can emulate them. By writing such an extensive lesson plan they are compelled to look at the minutia of teaching and be aware of the specifics of everything they will do.

This does however create a rather impractical lesson plan for classroom use so the next stage is to reduce it to a one page outline with clear headings listing what activities are to be done. The outline is then easily referred to without disrupting lesson flow while the teacher should already have a sound grasp of how the lesson is to be taught from having prepared the first draft. Additionally, the outline serves to return a little flexibility back to the lesson plan for there is a risk that detailed preparation will engender a rigid approach to the lesson "I've planned it this way, so I'm going to teach it this way!" Without recourse to all the detail, the teacher has fewer constraints and can employ the outline as a general framework from which to hang the lesson, though still allowing freedom to capitalise on expressions of student interest and space to deal with difficulties, which may be encountered during the lesson.

Some of these difficulties cannot be accounted for in planning, but generally a preventative approach should see most of them forestalled. Textbook graphics offer an easy starting point for introducing not only lesson themes but also the vocabulary that goes with them. Visual cues can be a starting point for brainstorming a vocabulary list, these words can then be used to create descriptions which in turn provide enough information for speculation on lesson themes and topics. As a prelude to discussions or reading activities brainstorming and more sophisticated word roses<sup>1</sup> can be used to focus attention on necessary vocabulary and then students can be directed to list positive and negative points on a particular theme. Thus providing a diverse spectrum of ideas from which they can launch into discussion or even just an opportunity to order the thoughts that they already have. And on a more basic level, thorough use of choral practice<sup>2</sup> should ensure smoother follow-on activities through greater familiarity with the material.

Lesson planning also requires an appreciation of timing, ranging from the general concept that all lessons need a beginning, middle and an end, to more specific concerns about pacing and the balancing of energy levels.

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<sup>1</sup> Word roses are a form of brainstorming based around a particular theme. A key word is written in the middle of the whiteboard and related vocabulary is elicited. These words in turn become key words for more specific vocabulary.

<sup>2</sup> Choral practice is a form of pronunciation drill where the teacher leads the class through a dialogue phrase by phrase with repetition of each phrase. It is a whole class activity aimed at improving pronunciation without specific attention to any



Students should not be expected to go straight into activities cold, so there needs to be a warm-up usually in the form of a weekend events discussion which can also double as a *holding pattern* for the class until everyone arrives. Then the teacher can begin the lesson proper with a short introduction, possibly reviewing the previous lesson and explaining what will be studied this time. The main body of the lesson can follow and when five minutes or so are left it is important that the teacher start winding down the lesson and summarising what has been covered in the class. This brings a sense of professional closure to the lesson and prevents situations where study is abruptly halted with the arrival of the next group of students. The same success can even be achieved with children's classes through the use of a clean-up song or doorway questions, which must be answered correctly before the students can exit.

For summarising to be used effectively it is necessary for teachers to develop a good sense of pace so that they can judge fairly accurately how long any activity will take or be able to juggle them in response to unexpected events in the class. Further complication arises again with children's classes as their shorter attention spans demand more changes in activities and also care in how they are balanced. Too much time on an activity can lead to boredom, control problems or hyperactivity<sup>3</sup>, while

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single student.

<sup>3</sup> Susan Rivers; *Tiny Talk Teacher's Book*; Oxford University Press; 1997; New York, 6

sequencing of activities tries to alternate high energy inputs with lower level ones in order to keep the students engaged and interested in learning.

All these factors have a bearing on the making of every lesson plan and so it is important that their preparation not be left to the last minute, in order to allow time for reflection and possible improvement. However there is a bonus to be gained for all the effort put into lesson planning as they represent an investment in the future. By keeping and reviewing them after each time a particular unit is taught and noting what did or didn't work it is possible to refine them and create a personal teaching manual which reflects the needs of the students more accurately than the original one. This represents a major labour saving which in future will allow teachers to check their files, adapt the lesson plan for those particular students and be prepared to teach in a very short time.

The last matter remaining to be done is to physically prepare for the lesson: to check that the tape deck or video are working, that the tapes are set to go, the flash cards have been divided into their topics, the games have all their parts, the white board pens work, model answers have been prepared, sufficient photocopying has been done and any other teaching aids needed are waiting in the classroom. Nothing has been left to chance and the lesson will go smoothly.

### **The Lesson Plan**

The first task in preparing a lesson plan is to assess the materials in

the text and decide how appropriate they are for the class and how best they can be used. Here the teacher has discretion to work with the text or use alternative materials based on the same theme if they present better learning opportunities for the students. Once this is decided it is possible to start working on a lesson plan. At this point the teacher is required to make three basic decisions, first, the aim of the lesson; second, the language to be targeted; and third, the teaching techniques to be used.

These need not be complicated decisions but should focus the teacher on the task ahead. For example, the aim of a lesson need not be limited to just one point, a dialogue based lesson might have a number of aims, to memorise a key structure, to improve pronunciation, to introduce new vocabulary, to promote confidence and to introduce role plays. While an article based lesson might just be focusing on discussion skills. Similarly, when deciding upon the language to be targeted there is room for flexibility, beginner level students may require more focused attention to grammar points, structures and vocabulary. However for other students this may not be necessary as they have more ability to understand language contextually and the combined knowledge of the class allows greater use of eliciting. And finally, the choice of teaching techniques will largely be dictated by the stated aims of the lesson, the above mentioned dialogue based lesson would undoubtedly involve various forms of choral practice and pair work.

Once these decisions have been made the lesson plan should start to take shape in what is basically a three stage format loosely described as

*presentation, practice and performance.* The exact content of each stage will vary according to the type of lesson being taught however the intention should meet the following criteria:

Presentation - the time to introduce new information to the class or direct their thoughts towards the theme of the lesson. This may include the introduction of vocabulary and grammar structures that will be used later in a lesson; discussion about the students' experiences or views; description of graphics in the text; or even a short teacher's monologue.

Practice - the opportunity to use the text in whatever form it takes. For dialogue based lessons this would include both controlled and guided practice in the form of choral practice and pair work, while for reading or listening based lessons basic comprehension, vocabulary matching, Jigsaw<sup>4</sup> and close<sup>5</sup> activities plus dictation would be appropriate.

Performance - the chance to use and interpret what has been learned in the lesson either through role-plays, free discussion, interpretation of information or debate.

These three stages provide the core of any lesson to which can be

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<sup>4</sup> A jigsaw activity takes individual sentences and rearranges the order of the words, the students have to recreate the sentence correctly. This can also be on a larger scale with dialogues, sentences in a paragraph and reading passages where the order of the paragraphs is altered.

<sup>5</sup> A close activity is where words are taken out of a sentence and replaced by blanks, the students have to fill in the missing spaces. This can also be done as a review or comprehension activity and a listening activity where students listen to a tape and fill in the missing spaces.

added any number of supplementary activities. The balance between core and supplementary activities depends largely on the students being taught, children's classes especially require more emphasis on support materials and activities due to their shorter attention spans and the need to include homework, revision, testing, monthly themes, games and songs in every lesson. For older students the emphasis changes with more need for warm-up activities and opportunities for personal expression.

Writing out the actual lesson plan is best done by first making a rough outline of the "three stages" of the lesson and adding in to each stage whatever supplementary activities best support the objectives of the lesson. This outline provides an over view of the shape that the lesson will take and allows the teacher to look at not only the balance and connectivity of the activities but also anticipate the time each activity will need and better judge the pacing of the entire lesson. At this point activities can be added or deleted as necessary, bearing in mind of course the need to have additional materials on hand just in case events don't go exactly as planned. Once everything has been decided the outline should be re-written as the final copy of the lesson plan.

### **Working with Dialogues**

As we are a conversation school it is essential that teachers understand how best to exploit the dialogues found in all our textbooks. They

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are central to our lessons and the oral skills they involve are a key factor in why students come to us. Text and tape study can only achieve so much, the human factor is what attracts people and our ability to engage students and keep them interested is critical to our success. Students need to feel that speaking English is an attainable skill which is both enjoyable and of practical value to them. Dialogues offer an entry point for them with controlled practice, confidence building activities and opportunities to express themselves as they become more assured. Often, it is a teacher's skill in using dialogues, which serves as a decider for a student joining a particular school or not.

First and foremost, it must be remembered that dialogues are an oral expression of everyday events and therefore must be delivered in a realistic manner rather than merely being read to the class. In fact they should be regarded as a short theatrical play, which the students will act out with the help of the teacher. As native speakers we employ intonation, stress, body language and gestures to express our feelings as we speak and we should ensure these are all present in the dialogues we perform. Some teachers may be reluctant at first to do this out of self-consciousness. Internet ESL web sites are full of postings by people claiming to be teachers not performing monkeys, but if you consider the good teachers in your past, they have all no doubt had a presence about them and a sense of good delivery. This can be equated to the theatrical presentation teachers should have and be considered simply as another teaching skill. Putting it in basic

terms, Japanese students tend to be shy and from personal experience it appears that they only return about 30% of the energy a teacher puts into an activity, so a theatrical approach will extract a more realistic response. By adding gestures, the students' attention will be divided between the words of the dialogue and co-ordinating their actions, which generally prevents them from thinking too much and leads to better reproduction of the dialogue<sup>6</sup>. And of course a happy student will be more responsive to the teacher.

Fortunately, most of the texts we use are well laid out for exploiting dialogues and have good graphics, vocabulary building exercises or discussion topics to help introduce their dialogues. This makes the teacher's preparation easier as pictures can be used to extract vocabulary, for comprehension questions, to spark personal recollections and to help anticipate what the following dialogue will be about. These all help set the scene for the dialogue and prepare the students for the theme to be covered. How involved this introduction is depends on the teacher, student interests and the time available. The next step is to model the dialogue, this is best done by the teacher rather than using the tape as the teacher has more

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<sup>6</sup> W. Timothy Gallwey in *The Inner Game of Tennis*, Random House, 1974, 38, discusses the inference that our Self 1, the ego-mind causes difficulties for the natural doing processes of our Self 2 and offers the following interesting quote from D. T. Suzuki who describes the effects of the ego-mind in his forward to *Zen and the Art of Archery* "As soon as we reflect, deliberate and conceptualize, the original unconsciousness is lost and a thought interferes ... the arrow is off string but does not fly straight to the target, nor does the target stand where it is. Calculation, which is miscalculation sets in ... Man is a thinking reed but his greatest works are

flexibility in matching delivery of the dialogue to the ability of the students. As mentioned before the dialogue should be delivered dramatically with the energy and actions that the students will be expected to produce later.

The third step is choral practice of the dialogue with the teacher using repetition drills to work on the students' pronunciation and intonation patterns. The dialogue should be broken up into manageable phrases, which are repeated 2-4 times depending on how well the students are handling the material. The key is in working with short phrases in a high-energy manner that is enjoyable for the students. Individual errors are not identified, instead phrases are repeated with stress on the problem area so that the students can practice using their ear and develop self-correction skills. Correction need not be laboured though, if students don't pick up their errors they can be addressed quietly later in the lesson. Should some longer phrases need to be worked on *backward build-up* can be employed with the teacher starting at the end of the phrase and adding to it word-by-word. In this way the usually more difficult to remember, end of the phrase, is committed to memory first and the whole phrase can be dealt with more easily. For variation the class can be split in half and compete against each other or take the roles of the people in the dialogue. The over-riding aim here is to make reading the dialogue easily achievable by concentrating on very basic pronunciation skills. By approaching it in this manner the teacher works towards the traditional strengths of Japanese students, namely group

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done when he is not calculating and thinking".



orientation and rote memorisation. This may not be the most popular technique today but it will help overcome the shyness of Japanese students and their concern about making errors in front of others. Comfort levels will be increased, the students will be pleasantly surprised at how quickly they can improve their pronunciation and their confidence levels will soar greatly. Of course care must be taken to ensure the repetition drills don't become boring and monotonous. This will depend largely on the teacher's energy levels but will also be influenced by the length of the dialogue being used. Longer conversations should be broken up into shorter sections and a further challenge can be added by having students close their texts after a couple practices and continue to work by ear alone. At the same time they should maintain eye contact with the teacher to add more realism to the activity and to allow the teacher to better read their response to the activity.

The next stage is to turn it from a fractured drill into a realistic dialogue using pair work. First, the teacher should take one of the roles and invite one of the better students to play opposite them. Again, emphasis should be on a theatrical delivery with eye contact, intonation, good pacing and gestures so that the rest of the class can see the dialogue *modelled* in the way, that they will be expected to produce. The teacher should then act out all roles involved and if possible have the best students repeat the dialogue again to show the class that they too can achieve similar results.

Now it is time for pair work to begin, though first, the students should be reminded of the basic ground rules of dialogue pair work. They should sit

back and relax rather than be hunched over their textbook, this will allow them to view the text and maintain maximum eye contact with their partner. Emphasis should be on smooth delivery instead of short, halting, memorised clips of dialogue. They should look down at the text and up at their partner in fluid movements, all the time carrying on an even flow of conversation. If too much attention is paid to the text the students will soon revert to reading aloud and race through the dialogue. Any pairs that finish before the bulk of the class are probably reading and should be reminded about maintaining more eye contact. This will inevitably happen quite often, especially given the common Japanese misconception that speed is the mark of a *good* English speaker. Gentle reminders will keep everyone on target or alternatively students can be asked to snap their fingers if their partner spends more than 10 seconds looking down. This is not so much a policing action but more a technique to draw attention to something they tend to do unconsciously. At the same time they should be reminded to include all the dramatic cues that the teacher modelled for them. If the choral practice has been done effectively the students should be quite confident in working with the dialogue, however if the class is having difficulties the pair work can be halted momentarily to chorally review the problem areas. To prevent any boredom setting in pairs should change roles after each run through the dialogue and partners should be changed every second time. Depending on the size of the class this will allow 4-6 practices. Another option is to use diagonal pairs, which will require each pair to speak over other people and

deal with greater background noise clutter. An unrelated tape played at the same time will have a similar effect and demand higher concentration from the students. The next challenge would be to close textbooks and repeat the dialogue.

And to finish, a degree of public performance could be introduced by having random pairs role play the dialogue in front of the class. The students should however have been warned in advance that this is going to happen, so that they are well prepared for the possibility. This provides a very effective impetus for serious practice though care should be taken not to place stress on weaker students.

The above outline has detailed how to use dialogues as they appear in texts, however there will be instances where dialogues come with substitution activities included or need modifying to more accurately reflect real language situations. In these cases it is best to halt the class once they have shown a good command of the dialogue in pair work practice and elicit from them what they think would be appropriate changes to the text. With substitutions the original phrases can simply be underlined and the students asked to provide alternative words, which would fit the dialogue. If it proves difficult hints can be provided. For example in the following dialogue from Oxford University Press' New American Streamline Departures series, Unit #15 Choices "...a pair of shoes" can easily be replaced by any other kind of footwear that the students can think of. However, as you read the dialogue you will see that it is rather simplistic:

Excuse me . . . .

Yes, can I help you?

I'd like a pair of shoes, please.

What colour would you like?

Brown.

What size are you?

Seven

Sure.

The sentences lack enough detail to be useful in a shoe store, so the students can be asked to think about points that need to be added. Acting out the scene can help and the white board can be used to build up the sequence of events that might occur. This scenario can then be used by the students to create a new, more realistic dialogue. Depending on time available the students can either work in pairs to produce a new conversation, which after checking by the teacher, can be presented to the class or everyone can work together, with the teacher using the students' suggestions to rewrite the dialogue on the white board. This new, improved dialogue will then be the basis for further pair work practice.

In other instances text dialogues may lend themselves to further extension or generate interest in a "what if ..." situation, for example having bought the shoes (or another item) in the above dialogue the customer may decide to return them and ask for a refund. As the students are already familiar with the story outline only a brief introduction will be necessary to set the next scene and two of the better class members can be selected to act out the roles of the customer and shop assistant. The teacher can use

prompts to direct the dialogue or ask the class to give advice to the actors. Cue cards can be useful for introducing ideas while allowing the students to create the language. Once the *actors* have worked their way through the dialogue the whole class can be asked to recreate it on the white board and if needed polish it into a fluid conversation. And again this can be followed by further pair work practice.

In some texts though there may just be too many dialogues in a unit and so the teacher is faced with a dilemma over what to do. The easiest solution is either to delete the least interesting dialogue or look at alternative ways to use them. There is no reason why they can't be used as stand alone listening comprehension practice as the students will still have to use their hearing and communication skills. In fact there are decided advantages besides adding variation to a lesson, for dialogues represent possibly the most authentic language that the students will encounter. Once the theme of the dialogue has been introduced and any difficult vocabulary explained the teacher should set two or three guiding questions to focus the students' attention. Then the dialogue can be played or read out by the teacher depending on the degree of difficulty. The guiding questions should be answered next, followed by the teacher deciding whether further exploitation is warranted. If needed, basic Yes/No and short answer questions can be asked, supported by more detailed WH-questions, though the teacher needs to take into account the changes required for turning direct speech into reported speech.

While on the topic of listening comprehension, there is also the option of introducing a dialogue as a dictation activity. After introducing the theme of the dialogue, it can be played a number of times in its' entirety for more advanced students, played with frequent pauses for intermediate students or read aloud (slowly) for beginner students. As with dictation of reading material, the aim is to challenge the students rather than expect them to accurately reproduce the whole dialogue. They must then work in pairs to arrive at as correct a version of it as they can. Again, the emphasis is on the process rather than the product. When the class has compared their work and recreated the original dialogue on the white board it can be used as the basis for further choral practice and pair work.

One last alternative where the textbook has good graphics related to a dialogue is to cover the dialogue and have the students concentrate on the graphics, first brainstorming vocabulary connected to the picture and then describing the details of the image. This will provide the class with a sound starting point for anticipating what the dialogue will be about. Done simply this can be a discussion activity with the students making suggestions about the possible content of the dialogue and why they think so. After they have expressed their opinions the dialogue can be uncovered and read to see how close they were and questions asked to check their comprehension. For a more detailed approach the discussion can be followed by the students working in pairs to create their own dialogue or together to produce a combined effort to be used for further pair work.

## Conversation and Discussion

For many students, conversation particularly free conversation, where they are allowed to literally gossip as they wish, represents the epitome of English usage. They may launch into it spontaneously, will interrupt each other and enjoy themselves enormously. This enthusiasm is seldom matched in other activities and should be encouraged, though interestingly, this is often best achieved by the teacher maintaining as low a profile as possible. There is little purpose in correcting what is often quite fractured English and so the teacher's emphasis should be on fluency and group involvement. Being supportive of less confident students through gentle body language and subtle control of dominant speakers by steering the conversation away from them will optimise everyone's opportunities and ensure they all enjoy the activity.

As a warm-up option such an approach works excellently and serves to prepare students for more *issues* based conversations, otherwise known as discussions. These range in levels of seriousness from small talk about movies, TV programmes and daily events through to vigorous debate over current affairs. The direction in which the discussion goes depends largely on the students themselves, their level and their interest in the selected topic. For it must be remembered that despite the students' interest in conversation it represents one of the most difficult language tasks that they will face as they have to listen accurately to what is being said around them, formulate their ideas and express them clearly within a group context.

Therefore it is best to limit discussion to comfortable topics that interest the students and resist the temptation to introduce serious issues until they are ready for them.

Even in more controlled situations working with intermediate level students where useful vocabulary has already been introduced there still remains the problem that text based discussion themes may not appeal to Japanese students. If they are disinterested or have never bothered to think about the topic, little will persuade them to become involved and switching to another activity can be the best course of action. Alternatively if there are no dissenting views from the majority opinion the teacher's playing of the devil's advocate is sure to arouse responses and force the students to justify their opinions.

Fortunately with advanced students few of these problems exist as they have the language skills necessary, take responsibility for their own learning by studying the articles which are given out to them a week in advance and are prepared to talk about them. This allows for a very straightforward lesson format of basically three questions:

- \* What is the article about?
- \* What is the writer's viewpoint?
- \* What is your opinion? (How does it apply to Japan?)

This requires paraphrasing of the original article, an understanding of the issues involved, an appreciation of the nuances in the article and an open expression of personal views with the ability to justify them. Here the article



is being used as a catalyst for discussion rather than material to be dissected and studied. If the students do have any questions about material content they can be dealt with prior to discussion or at the end of the lesson.

### **Listening Skills**

Conversation classes concentrate on the communicative aspects of our language and require strong emphasis to be placed on listening skills. It is fairly obvious that in order to communicate effectively we must be able to understand and respond to the language being spoken around us. Therefore it is important that we look at ways to develop our students' listening abilities. The whole time students spend in class can be viewed as an ongoing listening opportunity with the teacher maintaining a near constant flow of language for the students to work with. From the social pleasantries engaged in through out the lesson, including greetings, chatting and praise to the language used to manage the classroom activities, be it commands, explanations, comprehension checks and clarifications, and of course the actual lesson content itself, the students are continually being offered chances to extend their vocabulary and grammar skills. The challenge is to ensure that the students are kept engaged and view the whole lesson as a listening/learning experience and not just a series of activities to be performed.

As a starting point it is important that classroom language is delivered at a speed and in a manner that is understandable to the students. This

might be a contentious idea as many believe that students should be introduced to natural language wherever possible and that the slowing down of speech entails too large a divergence from what students would hear in the real world<sup>7</sup>. Such criticisms are quite valid, however we are not operating in an academic or even a purely ESL context. Our students have limited exposure to spoken English outside their one or one and a half hour weekly lesson and they have to struggle with deeply ingrained "romaji" pronunciation based on Japanese phonetic script. If you add educational and social conventions that inhibit questioning and actions that draw attention to individuals, it generally proves more effective to concentrate on ease of communication first and then gradually work towards more authentic forms of English. All too often students lose confidence when faced with English spoken at natural speeds and soon give up studying, however when lessons are slowed down to a pace that they can handle students respond well to *small successes* and *glory* in their own achievements. For us the choice is simple!

The next step can loosely be described as maintaining engagement, this is a combination of teacher responsibilities and clear expectations being placed on the students. Firstly, rapport must be built up with the students, a personal investment made by the teacher, so that each student feels that the teacher is interested in what they have to say. Secondly, lessons must have

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<sup>7</sup> Michael Lewis and Jimmie Hill, *Practical Techniques for Language Teaching*, 1997, Language Teaching Publications, Hove England, 28

clear purposes with easily understood instructions and routines but also flexibility to allow responses to student interests and a hint of unpredictability so that students never quite know what will happen next. Thirdly, the teacher should not play too central a role in the lesson, room must be left for student input and responses. And lastly, comprehension checks and active participation by all class members should be regular features of lessons. When added together this should create an environment where students are constantly exercising and improving their listening skills.

There is a wide range of possible listening activities, among them are:

- \* Simon Says - the classic children's game where students only respond to instructions with the preface of "Simon Says".
- \* Dictation
  - numbers, dates, telephone numbers
  - times, these can be written down on clock faces for children and as digital time for older students
  - bingo games based on numbers, vocabulary pictures or words
  - identify the correct picture, *Kodomo Eiken*, the Japanese Government's children's English proficiency test uses this approach with the students listening to a sentence and deciding which of three pictures the sentence applies to
- \* True or False questions using written passages, dialogues or pictures
- \* Following directions, students reach a certain destination
- \* Total Physical Response, students must follow instructions to physically do

something, "Go to the White board"

\* Working with written materials:

- The students are first dictated a list of words and after checking them, they must listen to a passage to determine which ones are repeated and how often this is done
- The students listen to a passage that is based around a vocabulary theme. Then they must list all of the target vocabulary they heard
- Jigsaw listening, the students listen to four or five random sentences and then place them in order
- \* - Close listening, the students are given a written passage with a number of words deleted, they then listen to the passage and fill in the missing words
- Listening for differences, the students are given a passage, which they read and try to remember the details of, next they listen to a similar passage and try to identify the differences between the two
- \* Dictation, first quickly read a passage to the students and then dictate it for them to write down. The sentences should be broken down into easily written phrases but not be repeated again except for a final rapid reading. The students should then work in pairs or small groups to check and discuss their work. The emphasis here is on the students co-operating to create a final correct copy. The students can then read out the passage to check their accuracy.

### **Intermediate and Advanced Materials (Reading & Listening Skills)**

It is the policy of the school that all classes are assigned set texts, however the style of text or study material changes as the ability of the students increases. Beginner level students work largely with dialogue based conversation texts, but then gradually move towards more four skills orientated texts and on to discussion materials. This is partly because of the type of texts available on the market but mainly because of student preference and our desire to widen their language horizons and see them use their English to express views and opinions about the world around us.

As a result the acquisition of sound reading skills becomes more important, for the students will be introduced to longer written passages to test their understanding and they will be asked to interpret information, make assumptions and give opinions. This is the starting point for developing good discussion skills. Though from a wider viewpoint the link between good reading and writing skills should be noted and that the more people read, the better their English skills will become<sup>8</sup>.

The question then is how best to approach the reading of passages, be they part of a general English text, short extracts from a novel, news clips or longer articles from newspapers or magazines. One common technique is to have the students take turns reading the text aloud and then to ask

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<sup>8</sup> David Cross, *A Practical Handbook for Language Teaching*, Prentice Hall, Hemel Hempstead, England, 1992, 79

comprehension questions followed possibly by group discussion. Unfortunately, this can become rather predictable and boring and is of questionable value to the students, especially with regard to their reading of the passage. It should be remembered that this material, unlike dialogues was never written to be used as a speech model and therefore presents an unnatural exercise for the students who will probably never be called on to give English speeches. The situation is also stressful for the students as they are being asked to read the extract *cold*, without any preparation, they have no model to go by and are being set up for failure. Their attention will be on pronunciation, without any thought to the meaning of the passage and as errors will occur each reader will make a poor model for the rest of the class. At the same time lesson flow will suffer as the reading will be interrupted by hesitation and the need to correct pronunciation errors. Meanwhile, *down time* is being created, with only one student reading, the others will have time on their hands, a few may read ahead but the attention of most is bound to wander. The result is inefficient use of lesson time and possible loss of student enthusiasm to study.

How then is the best way to approach this material? It depends of course on the students, the majority of them struggle with the concept of preparing for lessons, either due to the pressure of other commitments, uncertain schedules or lack of serious intent. For these students the most effective way is by dividing the lesson into three phases, first, presentation, second *reading* and third, exploitation. In the presentation stage it is best to

begin by introducing vocabulary that will appear in the following text or is related to the theme in general. This can be achieved by brainstorming, quizzes, crosswords or a warming-up discussion and if deemed necessary can be supported by brief explanations of grammar points and structures that will appear in the text, though probably this is only relevant to lower level students using short pieces of text. Then the passage can be introduced, accompanied by a few short remarks just detailed enough to attract the class' attention without giving away too much information. Lastly, the class is asked a couple of *guiding questions* to focus their attention on the text. These questions should centre on the main points of the story so that the students concentrate on the *wider picture* and don't get caught up in the details.

In the *reading* phase the students get their first actual look at the text and have a set time in which to read it. Remember, the aim here is to **read** the passage and for this purpose total understanding of everything in the text is not needed. Unknown vocabulary should be highlighted and students should try to determine the meaning of words purely through context. Over time the allotted reading period should be reduced to encourage the students to approach reading in English the same way as they do reading in Japanese. Once the passage has been read the material should be turned over and the guiding questions answered. The reading phase is now over! As short as it was, it has concentrated the students' attention entirely on the task at hand.

Now the teacher can move on to the exploitation phase which can

include any number of the following activities depending on time, student interest and the need to introduce variety into the lesson. However, first the students should be allowed another opportunity to read the text in preparation for a more detailed examination of it. Again time should be limited and while the next couple of activities should be done with closed books, there is room for teacher discretion. The initial activity can be a series of short answer, true-false questions requiring only yes-no answers. These can be aimed at the whole class with responses in unison or directed at individual students. It can be approached like a *never-ending questions* exercise where fast paced questions are asked of every sentence in the text. Here we are looking to increase the students' familiarity and understanding of the material by guiding them through the details of the passage with questions. This is followed up by a reproduction phase where more detailed WH-questions are asked to check the students' comprehension of the text. As an option, the students could be asked to create their own questions for each other, and if there are difficulties they can be allowed to refer back to the text for more details. Following this it would be timely to ask the students if they have any questions about the material regarding vocabulary, idioms or grammar points. Hopefully, the students will have drawn the correct conclusions from the contextual clues in the passage and will learn that their comprehension of the text has not been tied to an understanding of every written word. However, do not get tied down with grammatical details as they are not the main point of the lesson and it is sufficient to



simply draw them to the students' attention and leave them to induce the relevant grammar rules.

At this point more challenging questions can be introduced to test the students' communicative skills. Till now they have been working on factual details only, with all the answers being based on the text. By extending questions to cover personal connections to the theme, general knowledge about it and hypothetical situations the students are required to think seriously and this should generate original responses. These will undoubtedly include opinions and give us the building blocks for discussion and even debate. The occasional provocative statement or playing of the devil's advocate can then act as a catalyst to energise the students further.

If the teacher prefers to continue exploiting the text directly a number of options remain such as scanning, spot the mistake, dictation and guided writing. With scanning, the class have to read the passage again quickly in search of specific information such as a name or a date or it can be used to reinforce specific language areas like adjectives to describe people, noun groups or verb structures. In spot the mistake, the teacher reads the passage once more but intentionally adds a number of factual errors, which the class must correct. Dictation of the passage or part of it can strengthen listening skills as well as thought processes and communication skills. For this purpose the passage should be read at a speed, which will cause some difficulty to the students. While they are familiar with the material some gaps or errors will occur, then once the students have had an opportunity to check

their writing they can work in pairs to arrive at the most accurate copy of the original piece. Collectively they will have no problem in reproducing the passage, but individually they will have to consider the correctness of what they have written and discuss with their partner to arrive at a final answer. As a variation on this students can be asked to read out the dictation so that they can appreciate the need for clear pronunciation and intonation. Their classmates will soon point out problems if they have difficulty understanding them. Alternatively, the students can take turns reading back their sentences as part of the correction process. By this point the students should be very familiar with the text and should be able to read with minimal errors. For a final writing activity key words from a couple of sentences could be put on the white board and the students asked to flesh out the sentences from their memory of the text.

It is hoped that in this way the students will acquire a number of different reading strategies that will allow them to meet real world reading needs. These should include the ability to quickly scan newspapers for general understanding, to look for specific information in a text and make a detailed examination of a technical report. For good intermediate level students the emphasis however changes, most of the discussion texts come with CDs, which allow us to exploit the books as listening materials. This adds an extra degree of difficulty to all tasks and allows the same text to be used for different levels. Fortunately, there are many parallels between reading and listening skills, which allow the same techniques to be used for

teaching both. The same three phase approach can be used with listening simply replacing reading and even in the exploitation phase scanning can be a listening skill.

Similarly, written text can be read aloud by the teacher and used as listening material or vice versa listening material that is too difficult for students at it's original tape speed can be presented by the teacher at a more understandable speed. This does raise a number of issues regarding the authenticity of the material. As mentioned before written text is not intended for oral use and any slower re-creation of taped material will no longer be totally accurate. However, in our Japanese TEFL situation where students have very little exposure to any oral English or even written English outside of the classroom, authenticity is a less essential element of our teaching. This may not be the *accepted* approach today, but good modelling with correct grammar and clear pronunciation does provide accurate reinforcement for the students and removes a great deal of uncertainty when challenged by listening activities. If the text is delivered at an understandable speed, more of the class will be able to complete the activity and be further motivated by their success. (Plus, students can be taught survival techniques like asking for information to be repeated or rephrasing details to check if they are correct.) It may well be more effective from a long term learning point of view to strictly adhere to authentic language, but our students are not a *captive audience*, they are highly mobile and will literally *vote with their feet* if they find the classes too difficult. Feedback

generally comes in the form of empty seats rather than in comments to the teacher, especially given the Japanese proclivity for "*honne and tatemae*" ..... what you really feel and think verses what you politely say.

This doesn't however mean that the teacher's presentation of materials should be reduced to a slow elocution lesson, rather it should be delivered in a dramatic and exciting manner which will capture and hold everyone's attention though still challenge their listening skills. The teacher's role is similar to a storyteller using eye contact and body language to help explain the text. Intonation can help express emotions and feelings while stress and rhythm should emphasise key words and the flow of the language. Of course some passages can challenge even the most theatrical of teachers so it is important to be selective, a text that cannot be presented well will most probably also be boring for the students and is best ignored. Replacing it with one of more interest to them will make life easier for both the students and the teacher. Alternatively, text can be turned into *story* by treating it as a framework for a one-sided dialogue. Parts of the text can be read in their original form and extra details can be added to bring flavour while difficult sentences can be rephrased into simpler language. Vocabulary can be explained in mid sentence and the white board used if necessary. In this way text can be turned into natural and spontaneous language, which should keep all students engaged.

For the most advanced students (usually housewife groups) who approach their classes more seriously, written text in the form of newspaper

articles can be used as a catalyst for serious discussion. These students can be relied upon to study articles before the lesson and highlight unknown or unfamiliar vocabulary, idioms, sentence structures or grammar forms. The lesson then can concentrate on the themes raised in the article. Initially, the students should be asked simply to recall as many points as possible from the article. Those that come to mind first will be the ones that made the most impression on the students and should be noted for more detailed examination. Once all the main points have been elicited it is probably worthwhile checking if there were any unknown vocabulary or idioms that may have affected understanding of the material. Now they can be asked about the author's viewpoint or reasoning in writing the article, what their own opinions are on the subject and if possible how the theme relates to Japan or would be treated in a Japanese context. All questions should be open-ended with teachers concentrating on facilitating discussion rather than expressing their own opinions. Teacher talk should therefore be minimal and aimed at maintaining lesson flow, revitalising discussion when necessary or introducing related themes. At the end of the lesson time can be set aside for explanation of grammar points and distribution of the next article followed by a brief introduction of it.

### **Grammar**

The teaching of grammar presents a major challenge in an English conversation context because of the gulf in language skills between most

students and teachers. The vast majority of teachers have negligible Japanese ability and this greatly influences their ability to explain grammar. The traditional deductive method of teaching grammar where a teacher chooses a grammar point, explains the rules and has the students practice applying them works well for Japanese teachers but for many grammatical points this is far beyond the reach of most native EFL teachers. In most cases any explanation in English, especially for our mainstay beginner level classes, would be beyond their ability. This leaves teachers with two options, either evade the whole issue by not teaching or practising grammar at all or adopt an inductive approach and rely on the students to come to their own understanding of grammar rules from examples provided by the teacher.

The first option mirrors the natural way that we acquire our native language, continuous exposure gradually builds up a better understanding of our language with the teacher's role being to provide as much language input as possible. Grammatical points may be highlighted but are not explained or practised. This may well work in particular environments, however given Japanese students' limited weekly exposure to English it would appear that the inductive approach holds greater promise. First the teacher introduces the chosen grammar point and demonstrates its meaning with examples. The students are then asked to produce further examples and work with models provided by the teacher. Once they have shown sufficient understanding of its correct usage the students can be asked to explain the grammar rule themselves or the teacher can provide a brief

explanation. However, explanations need not always be given and it is sufficient that the model be copied down by the students to help them remember it and to give them something to refer back to later. At this point a final practice using a work sheet may be useful though time constraints may make this impractical. The advantage of this approach is that student participation is maximised and they are more responsible for their own learning. It should be remembered however, that it does take a while for grammatical rules to become internalised and so teachers should not expect students to have learned a particular rule and be able to reproduce it easily in following lessons. Learning is a gradual process, which requires continued exposure and practice before the knowledge becomes second nature to the students.

One key element in presenting grammar points is to use the white board to illustrate them visually, this physically requires the teacher to simplify any explanation due to the limited space available and makes it clearer for the students to understand a point. With spoken explanations it is easy for students to become confused with excess details. Simple time lines with an arrow marking the present point in time and crosses denoting events and dotted lines representing actions can be used to depict most tenses.



*"We went shopping yesterday                      and                      tomorrow we will go to*

*the movies."*

Basic rule models are quick to present on a white board, easy to understand and if the students wish, make revision at home a straightforward task.

Use of Adjectives and Nouns

	<i>nice</i>	<i>house</i>
<i>It's a/an</i>	<i>ugly</i>	<i>boat</i>
	<i>big</i>	<i>car</i>

Guided practice is easy to set up with the use of tables, which should be kept simple to prevent confusion or errors as the students repeat the structures. They also have the advantage of helping focus everyone's attention on a single task.

*Comparing two Things*

<i>The Honda is big(g) + <u>er</u></i>	<i>than the Toyota.</i>
<i>fast + <u>er</u></i>	
<i>safe + <u>r</u></i>	
<i>etc.</i>	
<i><u>more</u> economical</i>	
<i>fashionable</i>	
<i>etc.</i>	



While the white board should be a central feature in any explanation of grammar points it is recommendable to use it in conjunction with other forms of clarification. Turning grammar into a physical activity will aid comprehension immensely. Having students stand and physically follow instructions as they move around the room will help make grammatical differences clearer. The reverse, miming tasks to generate questions, can work equally well too. This also assists by putting into circulation language that will be dealt with in subsequent lessons, such as prepositions of place (in, on, under) and the imperatives of command. Adding graphics, either in the form of simple drawings or detail rich pictures like Jorg Muller's "Changing City" can hasten explanations and offer an interesting vehicle for practice. Searching through visually stimulating artwork can help enliven the often-boring act of practising grammar points. Care should be taken in deciding how best to provide the necessary guided practice, drills can be rather unexciting and even many of the activities found in grammar game texts have zero entertainment value. If drills are chosen it is often best to base them on events or actions familiar to the students so that they can draw on personal experience or knowledge. Games should have an element of competition as an incentive to motivate the students.

The simplest rule probably though is to be selective in choosing grammar points to work with, beginner students especially, will benefit from studying basic grammar and building up fluency in those areas which are most useful to them. Grammar points involving too many exceptions will only

add to confusion and should be avoided. Instead, concentrate on what is achievable and ensure proficiency in those areas. If students raise difficult issues or they appear in a text, highlight their existence, give a brief explanation if needed and move on.

### **Using White Boards**

All of our classrooms are equipped with white boards, which despite their basic style are an indispensable tool for teaching. They should however not be regarded simply as a medium for writing explanations or vocabulary upon, but rather as a focus for student attention and a key element in building good classroom dynamics. A major drawback with our system of assigning textbooks to all classes is that texts tend to capture the attention of students and can easily disrupt the flow of lessons. Once their heads are in their books, the teacher no longer has full control over the situation, the students' concentration shifts away from the teacher and may even wander completely. By *working* the white board the teacher has full command of their attention and can more easily judge the class' understanding of what is being taught and respond to student reactions. In a sense, the white board is a tool that connects not only the teacher to the class, but also the students to one another through the shared information it carries. This connection if exploited effectively can help build a warmer, friendlier and more supportive class atmosphere.

Also, many of today's textbooks contain exercises that lend

themselves equally well to white board use. By transferring them to the white board they become group activities requiring the participation of all students and offering opportunities for co-operative study. For example a quick look at three of the texts we presently use: "J-Talk" from Oxford University Press, "First Impact" from Longman and David Nunan's "Go For It!" reveals many opportunities for exploiting the advantages of white board use. The following random units illustrate this point:

"J-Talk" Unit #5 "What's the Occasion?"

Part 1 is a listening activity describing 5 snapshots of Japanese festivals. The students listen to the descriptions and then check their comprehension in pairs.

In Part 2 the students read a chart detailing special Japanese occasions (festivals), the people who attend festivals and the activities connected to festivals in general. Next, the students choose two of the occasions and complete another chart detailing information on specific festivals. This is followed up by oral pair work where one student describes an event and their partner must guess the occasion.

\* As this information is common knowledge among Japanese this activity can easily be transferred to the white board by first writing up the categories and then eliciting the information from the students themselves. Following this the random details can be placed into sets by the students and then used for the oral activity.

Part 3 is a listening activity using a picture chart and followed up with comprehension questions in pairs.

Part 4 is another chart of special Japanese occasions where students each choose an occasion and answer questions describing the traditions related to the event. This activity then has an interesting twist in that the students work in groups and add purposely incorrect information to their charts. These charts must then be read aloud and the rest of their group must find the error.

\* Again, this chart activity offers an opportunity to elicit details from the students and maximise everyone's participation in the lesson. Inclusion and shared learning rather than individually focussed study should be underscored as befits a *conversation* school rather a grammar cram school.

Parts 5,6,7 and 8 are intended for individual study with an English-Japanese word list, a context matching chart for verbs and nouns, a crossword puzzle and a chart requiring an unsuitable noun be removed from sets of matching nouns and verbs.

\* While these are intended more as homework exercises they can all easily be reworked into white board activities with possibly more emphasis on evaluating how well the language of the unit have been learned. The main point being that *heads down* activities can be transformed into whole class exercises stressing group learning and involvement.

"First Impact" Unit #4 "High Tech."

Page 1 is a written brainstorming activity about everyday machines that we use.

\* By using the white board this activity becomes far more energised and interesting, students can feed off each others ideas and the result will be a much wider range of answers than if they were working individually. This can be further enhanced, by adding the challenge of teams competing against each other for the most vocabulary points. As an intended warm-up activity more heat and enthusiasm can be engendered on the board than in the book.

Page 2 entails listening for specific details and answering comprehension questions followed by more open-ended opinion questions.

Page 3 provides a list of high tech machines and asks the students to underline those that they have and then work them into a controlled conversation practice.

\* While the list is very useful, using the brain-stormed list created by the students themselves will provide more immediacy to them and a sense of ownership to the language being used. Plus it is efficient use of time and materials, it would be wasteful not to harness the effort of the students and quite possibly they would create a superior list anyway.

Page 4 focuses on grammar awareness by working on prepositions of place, first in a listening activity, then through correction of sentences with errors in them and lastly with the students creating their own sentences.

\* By doing the correction on the white board with students coming forward

to revise the sentences the teacher can more efficiently monitor common errors and provide explanations to the whole class without having to check each individual's work. This also allows more responsibility to be placed on the students, they must stand before their peers and physically show their understanding. The awareness that they must produce accurate language is a powerful motivator and success similarly adds to their confidence in themselves.

Page 5 involves the description of a room through pair practice using word cues and a detailed picture, followed by the students describing their own rooms.

Page 6 consists of reading and writing activities, which require the students to match advertisements with new products and then write their own advertisements for the class to identify the product.

\* While not truly a white board exercise the small size of our classes do allow for some of the advertisements to be transcribed to the board or more simply photocopied at a larger size and displayed on the white board so that the class can work together from them. Here the aim being simply to promote a more intimate study environment.

"Go For It" Unit # 12 "My favourite subject is science."

Page 1 requires the students to identify vocabulary used in the picture, listen for specific information (subject names) and practice the dialogue in the picture.

Page 2 continues with listening activities with jumbled dialogue sentences needing to be placed in order and matching adjectives to nouns followed by pair work practice about favourite subjects and why they are liked. It finishes with a grammar focus on personal pronouns.

Page 3 asks students to complete a close exercise with the help of a vocabulary list and a dialogue, complete a chart about their favourite subject and teacher and then work in teams writing sentences using the word "favourite" to which the other team must respond with an appropriate question.

\* While all these activities are well thought out they do result in students spending three pages concentrating mainly on their text with little interaction between them and the teacher apart from checking their answers and only the one final class building activity. This can result in a rather boring lesson style so by dividing the students' attention between their books and the white board the teacher can create a more active environment for the students. The matching activity, grammar focus and close exercise can just as easily be done from the board by the whole class and in so doing change the pace and focus of the lesson.

Page 4 deals with subjects studied at school, class schedules, listening related to both these topics and creating conversations about subjects that are liked.

\* Here the text need not even be opened as personal information can be elicited from the students and displayed on the white board rather than

checked in a book or squeezed into a small form. This is familiar information to them, which they should be able to use easily with the help of cues from the board. And even the listening, as it is not too detailed could be done on the white board as a delayed listening activity, just to add an interesting twist. The time between hearing the information and getting to the white board to write it down adds an extra challenge and builds excitement into the lesson.

Page 5 includes reading for specific information and general comprehension, writing and reading about personal schedules and then reporting on other students,

Page 6 is a self-check page though parts of it could be done on the white board if the teacher wished to confirm the class's general understanding of the material taught in the unit.

Knowing how and when to use the white board effectively also helps teachers present a professional image to students. Working the white board rather than relying on the text places the teacher directly in front of the class and makes them the focus of everyone's attention. Taking full advantage of this attention requires a clear understanding of how best to operate this piece of equipment. Obviously, the basics start with a clean board at the beginning of each lesson and require a clear simple and legible writing style. It is preferable that everything be printed as it is easier to understand and use of capital letters should be limited as Japanese students are not familiar



with their use to stress important ideas and have surprising difficulty in reading them. Care needs to be taken positioning yourself while writing so that the students can view the board as you write and to allow yourself to refer back to the class easily. Showing the students your back as you write doesn't promote communication so standing at an angle presents a more accessible image, especially if the teacher continues talking to the students all the while. The students can be kept involved through the use of classroom language and the setting of tasks like reading what has been written, answering comprehension questions as they go, anticipating the next points and even spelling words. This keeps momentum rolling and minimises the down time during the lesson.

Organising the board also helps make it a more effective tool, it is common practice to divide it into three sections, with the left side used for vocabulary, the right for grammar points and the middle as a working area. The information on either side includes the main learning points of the lesson and remains on the board so that the students can take note of it while the middle area is used for ongoing work and is continually cleaned and reused. Unfortunately, the shape of many of our classrooms precludes the use of large white boards so teachers need to be both flexible and economical with words when using the boards.

The key is in providing short, simple definitions and model sentences, which can be easily understood by the students. The shorter the definition, means that less time is taken to write it up and interruption to the lesson

flow is reduced. Similarly, the student is provided with concise information, which is easier to remember and use. Plus, having to write down long sentences is a recipe for boredom and disinterest, which could lead to control problems. Explaining grammar structures needs to be approached the same way with clear titling so that they can be referred to later and the bare minimum of detail to reduce any possible confusion.

For example:

*S/HE + .....s*

*I etc.*

*like .....*

*enjoy .....*

*hate ....*

*but*

*He/She*

*likes ....*

*dislikes ....*

Fortunately, most texts take a similar approach these days so it is generally safe to use their examples and to transcribe language practice tables as they appear in the book, though be ready to modify them if necessary. Noting too that it is preferable wherever possible to personalise such material by eliciting information from the class or simply using the names of students.

The centre of the white board meanwhile remains a free flowing area to be used as the needs of the lessons dictate. New information and activities can be introduced here, revision of past grammar points can be carried out and homework/text exercises can be checked with cues for correction given as needed. It is important however to note here that the white board need

not just be the domain of the teacher, there is no reason why students shouldn't be invited to use it as well. Most of the above activities can be opened up to the class in the form of having them write up elicited information, restate grammar patterns, correct work on the board or provide their own sentences for class discussion and checking. Only correction need remain the teacher's sole prerogative as correction cues such as close sentences with appropriate gaps or grammar patterns must be given in a timely manner.

In addition to the written uses of the white board detailed above, it also provides a *canvas* for the teacher to sketch upon. Regardless of your artistic skills, sketching provides a rapid means of conveying information, whether it is vocabulary for expressing feelings like happy or sad faces or more specific facts like a sequence of events or a story. Simple faces and stick figures are capable of all manner of emotions and actions. The key is to have a clear picture of what you want to draw in your own mind and to remember to maintain an ongoing dialogue with the class to ensure they continue to be attentive. Eliciting information from the students provides ownership of the material and acts as an investment for continued participation.

Practical examples of the use of sketching include correction, a stick figure sitting on top of a car in response to a student saying "get on the car" will soon draw the required response of "get in the car" in a light hearted manner. Themes can be introduced by pictures in a form of visual

brainstorming, either with the teacher drawing in response to student suggestions or with the students being invited to draw on the board themselves. For instance, when discussing weather, having the students draw weather symbols on the board will extend their vocabulary far more effectively than any word list. A sequence of events can be used both to elicit information as an introduction or as a review of previously studied material. Some texts such as "Max in America" and "Frequency Squares for Business and Technology" rely totally on this approach and provide useful ideas on how to exploit this media. Max, the central character from Pro Lingua's "Max in America" travels around the United States introducing students to many situations that may occur and requires them to create dialogues to deal with each event. While "Frequency Squares" uses visual information in the form of pictures, graphs and pie charts to extend questioning and comprehension skills in a business environment and covers a wide range of areas from simple introductions to giving detailed presentations.

### **Correction**

Correction represents one of the more *interesting* areas of teaching endeavours as it plays a crucial role in the success of any lesson. The atmosphere of a class and the development of relationships both between the students and the teacher and among the students can easily depend on the method that a teacher takes to correcting errors. So it is important that the task is approached with tact and addresses issues of student comfort,

inclusiveness, practicality and long term goals.

To begin with the teacher must be aware of the Japanese perspective of the learning process, students are expected to have memorised all the facts on any given topic and be able to recite them in exams. There is little need for interpretation and *good* students should be able to achieve near perfect scores. Correspondingly, any questioning activity in the classroom tends to be assessment orientated with the expectation of correct answers and little or no time for correction or assistance for weaker students. To be fair, Japanese teachers are under intense pressure to cover a large curriculum, teach 45 student classes and ensure that as many students as possible pass university entrance exams. These demands limit their teaching options and result in little individual attention for students.

The Western idea of mistakes being inevitable and a natural part of the learning process represents quite a cultural gulf for students who are products of this system to cross. Learning from our mistakes and incorporating them in the teaching process is a totally new idea for them and must be introduced carefully. Teachers must be sensitive about any actions, which might affect student self esteem or lower their confidence in using English. Therefore, the first rule of correction is probably not to over use it! Selective correction will achieve the same aims without as much pain. So when working on fluency such as in free conversation and discussion it is less disruptive and certainly more confidence inspiring to allow students plenty of latitude and later highlight only a few important mistakes which everyone

should be aware of. While for activities targeting accuracy it is important that correction is done promptly and that preventative planning is employed to ensure that fewer mistakes are made to begin with. If the lesson material is introduced and explained with all possible difficulties in mind there should be few mistakes. Should an unacceptable number occur, it is a clear signal to the teacher to start thinking about re-presenting the material or switch to alternative material rather than continue with the practice.

Having decided that correction is necessary the first step is drawing attention to the fact that a mistake has been made and identifying where it occurred. Often just pointing out that an error has been made, either through gestures, eye contact, or repetition will be enough for the student to reconsider what they have said and self correct any obvious error. If they cannot recognise the error themselves, the phrase or sentence can be repeated with the location of the mistake highlighted by pauses immediately before and after the error, counting the words on your fingers or using space lines on a white board. In this way students are given the opportunity of becoming more independent learners and to take greater responsibility for themselves.

Should a student still be unable to resolve the problem further hints can be offered or the rest of the class can be invited to help. By tapping the collective knowledge of the group many corrections can be achieved without the need for direct intervention on the part the teacher and hopefully a sense of community can be fostered among the learners. Each class has a different

character of course but if the teacher promotes a relaxed atmosphere and encourages active participation by all members it is possible to create an environment where student correction, be it self or group focussed, becomes the norm and the teacher need only act to confirm or adjudicate on student input. Here the emphasis must be on the students helping each other rather than correcting one another and it is crucial to encourage supportive group dynamics. The long-term goal here is a situation where the teacher maintains a low profile and as much responsibility as possible is transferred to the students.

Where correction is necessary the teacher has two options which, though somewhat contradictory, in theory, provide a good classroom balance. In the first, teachers should highlight the error in whichever way they prefer and call on the first student to correct it, if it is not possible even after hints, further students can be drawn in until the problem is solved. At this point the original student is called upon to provide the correct answer again using the full sentence structures from their first attempt. It cannot be assumed that the student has been following the solution process and understands the logic behind it so it is important to check that they do comprehend things fully and are not saying they understand as an easy recourse to escape the teacher's attention. By repeating the answer in full both the contextual links and the correct grammatical forms will be the last things committed to the student's memory and should over-ride the incorrect answer initially formulated. Though time consuming this emphasis on correct production

should increase student confidence and encourage them to use correct forms.

The other alternative is to re-formulate student errors without openly correcting or requiring them to repeat the full sentence structure as above. The logic behind this is that students acquire grammar skills unconsciously through what they hear and read and that if they are not being pressured to correct errors they will be relaxed and more likely to learn. So for example a re-formulation may go as follows:

**Student:** "I went to shopping at Matsuyama and I bought some *G-pansu*."

**Teacher:** "Oh, so you went shopping *in* Matsuyama and bought some *jeans*."

By using a combination of both options the teacher has greater flexibility when working with student errors. Different learning styles can be more easily accommodated; the more adventurous learners have an opportunity to work with their mistakes; visual learners can be assisted with white board cues; and reflective learners have space to consider the re-formulations that they hear. Similarly, different levels within a class can be handled more effectively with a rigorous approach for better students and a gentler manner for less capable students who make many errors and would feel threatened by direct correction.

To this point correction has been dealt with purely as an oral matter which is wholly appropriate for a conversation school, however there will be some occasions where written work will also require some correction. In



these cases where written homework has been given or part of the lesson has involved written work or exercises, the same approach as to oral correction still holds true and every effort should be made to transfer responsibility to the students. They can be asked initially to check their partner's work, compare it with their own and then discuss which is the better answer. Then sample answers can be taken from around the class and the group can decide on the correct answer with the teacher providing direction, assistance where necessary and being the final arbiter on all answers.

In this way the positive aspects of correction can be encouraged with both students and teachers regarding it as an additional learning opportunity. For students, they can work on problem areas, which they all need to master and for teachers correction helps identify obstacles to learning and works towards their removal. Rather than being an impediment to the smooth flow of a lesson they represent constructive extensions to any lesson.

### **Lesson Plans for Children's Classes**

There are a number of key elements that should be present in all children's classes, namely, a teaching goal, revision activities, ample practice, a balance of high and low energy periods, lots of fun and a rigorous expectation that children can succeed well in English. Within these guidelines teachers have considerable freedom to plan classes and build lessons around their teaching strengths. At the same time they should be aware of the

greater need to engage children, to keep them interested, to work around their short attention spans and make learning a fun activity for them. This generally translates into lots of activities with quick transitions, which don't allow them to get bored or become over-excited. They should walk away at the end of the lesson wanting to come back rather than being in class only because their parents have sent them.

Drawing up lesson plans therefore requires a balance between teaching considerations and attention to student preferences. Fortunately, combining the two is less of a challenge if variety is always incorporated into the lesson. Most teachers create a teaching framework onto which they add activities, practice and games. This should take into account the advantages of matching units in the texts to calendar months to allow a cycle of one week for introduction, two weeks for practice and a fourth for testing and evaluation.

There are many ways to look at lesson planning, the most straight forward way is to work from the teacher's book which goes with each of the texts we use for children's classes. The *Finding Out* series from Heinemann is a phonics based text which uses what it calls a "Questioning Approach" to attract and keep the students engaged, and incorporates many games and activities to provide practice and link previously taught language together. The teacher's book therefore provides a good starting point to work from and build on, as well as a useful reference for deciding on revision. It clearly identifies each unit's language target, and includes games, songs, activities,

dictation exercises, dialogues, vocabulary and homework exercises.

The lesson planning process should begin with the teacher first checking where the class is in the text and creating a rough list of activities that could be included in the lesson. The teacher will already have an idea of what is required from the material used in previous lessons. Then the target of the lesson should be clearly identified and the best activities for introducing, reviewing or practising it should be selected. These will become the main activities of the lesson and be supported by a range of supplementary activities to add variety to the class. The format of the lesson can now be organised with a warm-up activity, checking of homework and alternating main and supplementary activities. The switching of activities is intended to prevent the students from losing interest in the target language by providing a continuously changing focus. The order of the main activities should allow for reviewing of any past target language that will be used in following games, then presenting or re-presenting the current target language followed by practice, games and songs on the same theme. There should be written reinforcement of the target and time set aside to introduce and explain the homework for the next week. The lesson should then end with a separate closing activity. Once this plan has taken shape it should be checked for content, do the main activities build on each other? Do they flow smoothly? Were the most effective activities chosen? Do the support activities fit together well? If the answers are "yes", the lesson plan can be finalised and the teacher can start preparing the materials and consider if

any special teaching instructions are needed for the activities.

There are of course other ways to approach lesson planning, one rather simple idea is to take advantage of the well integrated Home Book that supports the class text and basically *reverse engineer* lesson plans. Use the class text and incorporate support materials too, but plan the lesson around the homework page that is to be assigned and ensure that it is fully covered in the lesson. The homework will have the same target language and vocabulary and the material can be introduced, practised, reviewed and worked on in games or other activities in the same manner as the above lesson planning style. A copy of the homework can even be done in class to make certain that the target of the lesson has been understood and then the teacher can be confident that the students will successfully complete their homework, without problems. Another alternative in organising activities is to alternate between questions, target language activities and support activities to provide more immediate communication tasks for the students. The questions can start with basic name, age, and address type questions and expand as the students learn more language.

### **Advice and Techniques for Children's Classes**

Teaching is a broad based skill which given our situation should not really be compartmentalised into different speciality areas. We must be equally adept with many kinds of students from young children through to retirees so it is important that we view teaching as a process that we modify

in response to the requirements of different students. Our approach must be fluid and ultimately responsive to the realities of each class. With all levels of classes some challenges never change, we have to generate an emotional interest in what is being studied, the language should be personalised, it should deal in concrete terms and learning should be enjoyable. For children this equates to interesting materials, games and presentation; questions about themselves; tactile learning using touch, actions and interactions with other students; and fun learning games.

The specifics of teaching children therefore revolve around differences in application rather than thinking. The first steps are in building up a rapport with the students by being warm and friendly towards them, sitting on the floor, participating in activities and keeping them engaged. Everyone should be encouraged to participate in activities and hints given to help students answer questions. All activities should be well presented with clear instructions and unambiguous answers that maximise the students' abilities to succeed. Language tasks should always be achievable with ample review and a gradual build-up of difficulty. However, the pace of the lesson should always be stimulating with no opportunity for the students to become bored and constant changes in activities to present more challenges.

Games and songs are an integral part of this process as they make learning enjoyable, help maintain spontaneity by taking the students' minds off practice drills and sometimes even provide incentives to study harder in order to win. The best games are generally the ones that are fun to play and

have flexible formats, which can be adapted to a wide range of different language patterns or allow gradual increases in difficulty. Care though must be taken to ensure that everyone has a chance to win and this often requires the judicious use of penalties or time outs. There is also room for playing games that employ non-targeted language simply because energy levels are low and the class needs livening up before going on to another activity. Games do however come with some risk attached, they should not really be used as a reward or for maintenance of discipline as this reduces the study value of the game. Similarly, over-use of games limits their worth and so it is more effective to work with a smaller number of games and gradually increase the difficulty of their language. Also, it is important to monitor how games are being used, the many versions of Bingo lend themselves to a more student-centred approach once the students are familiar with them, student callers should replace teachers as soon as possible.

The major problem that teachers usually face with children's classes is dealing with badly behaved students. This is best dealt with holistically by creating a classroom environment, which reduces the likelihood of problems. Learning and behaviour rules should be established from the first lessons through firm reactions to any unacceptable conduct. Rules need not be stated strictly but there should be consistent responses to any actions that are not allowed such as running around the class, crawling under tables or disrupting other students' study. Once students are aware of the boundaries of acceptable behaviour it is easier to identify and respond to specific

problem children. It may be that a child finds the lessons too difficult or too easy which can be dealt with by providing extra attention or giving the student more responsibility in the class and placing higher expectations on him or her. Often problems are just the result of lapses in concentration, which can be prevented by teachers keeping an eye on students and calling their names when their attention begins to wander. If this happens more often seating positions can be changed so that disruptive students are closer to the teacher, or the teacher can make a habit of changing their seating position each lesson or throughout the lesson to keep the students focussed. Many problems however can be prevented by maintaining a fast and interesting lesson pace, if the class is fun and exciting students will have less opportunity to misbehave and their eagerness to participate can be a strong incentive to moderate their behaviour. This will require good lesson planning, preparation of the classroom so that teaching materials are readily at hand and special attention to transitions between activities so that there is little loss of momentum.

## **4. Methodology and Classroom Management**

Once teachers have become familiar with the basic teaching techniques and materials the next step is learning how to deal with the human factor of the teaching equation. Responding to the people in the classroom and ensuring that they are given the opportunity to excel individually while still working within the boundaries of the group context. This requires discipline from teachers, as they need to understand how to control a teaching environment that varies considerably from class to class and places constantly changing demands on them. At the same time the must exercise sensitivity to the feelings of the students and recognise the nuances of the feedback that they receive so that they can continually adapt to the needs of their students.

### **Classroom Management**

For all beginning teachers the two greatest challenges of their new profession are acquiring proficiency in the teaching techniques that they must employ and developing effective classroom management skills. However it is important that they view both areas as interrelated, all teaching decisions from the choosing and pacing of activities to the inclusion of strategies for improving student comfort have direct effects on issues of order and management. Similarly, weaknesses in classroom management can cause the best planned of lessons to fail and the wasting of considerable



effort. Therefore it is crucial that teachers take an integrated approach to the operation of their classroom. This should begin at the lesson preparation stage with special attention to how the lesson will flow, a concerted effort to keep students on task and rapid response to any disruptive behaviour that occurs.

The teacher's initial responsibility is to consider how they will arrange the pacing of activities and maintain the momentum of the lesson. This is of particular importance to children's classes for the combination of shorter attention spans requiring more changes in lesson activities, being taught in a second language and natural exuberance serve to create a rather unstable environment. Preparation therefore requires close attention to the mix of activities with slower ones always preceding high-energy activities as expecting hyped-up students to switch quickly to a writing exercise is unrealistic. Smooth changes between activities demand good planning with clear well thought out instructions and new materials close at hand. Similarly, pacing of activities needs to have been thought out in advance as not allowing enough time will lead to confusion or misunderstandings while allocating too much time if not rectified quickly in the class is creating opportunities for non-involved students to misbehave. Materials also need to be appropriate to the level, age and interests of the class and special consideration has to have been made for the presence of either bright or slow students.

Once in the classroom the emphasis switches to keeping students on

task through preventive class management. This again is particularly appropriate to children's classes but can also be modified for application to adults and entails the developing of rules and procedures, which can be put in place to limit potential problems and disruptions. The rules should clearly state what students can and cannot do and be kept to a minimum. While the procedures are methods for doing something which are taught to the students and cover areas like movement in the class, student talk and what to do during downtime and are aimed at controlling student behaviour and promoting classroom efficiency.

- With children's classes teachers have to ensure that students move smoothly from one activity to another so they need to establish rules and procedures to minimise disruptions when distributing worksheets, selecting teams, collecting flash cards, giving out game materials, and putting away cushions to allow space for action activities. Another source of distraction is student chatter which includes talking at inappropriate times, asking questions which slow down the pace of the lesson, talking to another student when the teacher is explaining something and talking when other students are answering questions. This requires clear rules such as no talking when the teacher is talking and procedures to make classroom discussion more satisfying and productive, such as turn taking, talking one at a time, listening to other student's answers, and raising hands. Downtime between activities presents another area which, though primarily a teacher responsibility, can benefit from rules about acceptable behaviour. The end of class is a further

period of possible confusion and procedures should be put in place to reduce confusion. They can include giving out homework in mid-lesson instead of adding to stress at the end of the lesson, warning students that the end of the lesson is approaching and establishing an end of lesson routine. This could take the form of a clean-up song that includes putting books into bags, stacking cushions away and queuing at the door for exit questions.

To be effective though it is important that teachers establish a limited number of rules and procedures as otherwise they can become unwieldy and impractical. They should then be taught and used routinely with emphasis on consistent enforcement or else there is a risk that they will lose their effectiveness. For example creating a rule that states all students should raise their hands before answering questions and then allowing some students to just shout out their answers will soon render the rule ineffective. Of course maintaining consistency can be difficult for it requires splitting one's attention in a number of directions. The teacher must be able to introduce an activity and keep it flowing, while monitoring student inputs, thinking about the next activity and maintaining class control. Unfortunately, it can be easy to miss something. Secondly there is a tendency for new teachers to want to fit in and get on well with the students. Under the guise of building up a good rapport with the students it is often easier and less threatening to allow certain behaviour to slide. However, by not confronting a problem and dealing with it at an early stage it often grows into a major issue at a later date.

In addition it is very important to build student accountability into every lesson, teachers must make clear the expectations they have of their students, grammatically correct language, neat work, and a respectful attitude to the teacher and other students. This places a corresponding responsibility on the teacher to provide clear instructions, always display good language to the students and actively monitor them to ensure that they understand activities and are on task. The teacher should then circulate, giving assistance where necessary, introduce more challenges and ensure that all work (including homework) is checked so that the students understand that everything they do must be of a high standard.

It is inevitable though that some disruptive behaviour will occur so it is useful to understand the causes of misbehaviour. The obvious ones are boredom, a reaction to being forced to attend classes by parents, a dislike of the teacher or other students, rebelliousness or pre-existing problems that affect a student's general behaviour. As a rule, good planning or judicious changing of class members can alleviate most of these causes while the added complication of students with pre-existing psychological or emotional problems can best be helped by patience and a positive attitude in the hope that they will eventually come around.

When students do misbehave the key to handling the situation is reading the events of the classroom accurately, by being observant, targeting offenders quickly and accurately and dealing with them unobtrusively without drawing any attention to the fact, the teacher can

prevent many problems from ever happening. Simply maintaining eye contact or moving closer to an errant student may persuade them to desist from their behaviour, if not, direct contact by placing a hand on their shoulder whilst still addressing the class will achieve the desired result without disrupting the flow of the lesson. Success in the use of this approach has the added benefit of building an atmosphere where students see little in the way of errant behaviour and therefore have less inclination to misbehave themselves.

In situations where the teacher has limited mobility in the classroom or where the above non-verbal interventions have not had the desired effect it will become necessary to switch to graded verbal alternatives. Simple reminders like "*Shhs, No's or Stops*" should be effective if delivered with a serious tone of voice and can be extended into short phrases with the addition of "Take turns" or "It's too noisy." Here the emphasis remains on responding to student misconduct, with the least disruption to the flow of the lesson as possible. For really serious breaches of classroom order it may be helpful to explain rules and the reasons behind them but there remains the difficulty of trying to communicate with students of limited English ability. It is better therefore not to expend too much energy on severe reprimands and concentrate instead on developing a positive and supportive atmosphere in the classroom.

This can be influenced readily by the energy the teacher brings to the class a bright, friendly and interested disposition coupled with attention to

the appearance of the classroom will immediately help to set a positive mood to the lesson. This can be built upon by the teacher showing a willingness to interact with the students through introducing interesting activities and participating along with them. Then by closely matching teaching materials to the level of the students, setting achievable goals and being supportive as they work towards them, the teacher can encourage confidence among the students and hopefully a real interest in attending classes. Within this environment the use of rewards and personal encouragement represents the best means of reinforcing positive student behaviour. Most children will respond positively to the allure of shiny stickers or the choice of which stamp to put on successfully completed work, especially if they are part of a system where the stickers and stamps can earn certificates of achievement or other more interesting prizes. Even more effective is control over the selection of games to be played in class, Uno and Bingo are firm favourites which also have strong language content. These games and others like them can in addition confer sought after status on students who play important roles such as the caller. Similarly, everyone reacts positively to encouragement, praise like "That was great! Can you find another word?" is sure to keep a student, doing a word search much more motivated than, "Now, can you give me another one." There is a proviso though, the praise must be genuine as if it becomes an automatic reaction it soon loses any value and can make the teacher appear very superficial.

Fortunately, most of the students that attract the teacher's undue

attention do so because of their inattention, clowning around or disruption of other students, none of which are in themselves particularly anti-social behaviours. For those who are repeat offenders direct measures may be necessary, having a student sit beside the teacher or apart from the other students is one way to modify their behaviour while giving them more active roles in lesson activities allows them less opportunity to misbehave. Another option is to theatrically introduce a penalty card system similar to that used in soccer, which is generally entertaining for the class and effective as well. In a somewhat more serious vein the teacher can keep a score each lesson of everyone's misdemeanours. Here the teacher simply goes to the white board and places a check mark beside the name of each student as they misbehave. Nothing is said at the time but if they exceed a stated limit for the lesson they face a time-out or in serious cases the school's management will contact their parents.

However no amount of rules, procedures and techniques will help new teachers unless they display assertiveness and confidence! For remember, students are also professionals in education and they can easily identify tentativeness or indecisiveness. It is essential therefore that teachers must look and act appropriately, exuding confidence in their voice, the way they move, their eye contact with students, their belief in themselves, their ideas and their decisions. Fortunately, Japan as a society is very respectful toward teachers which makes the task of new teachers that much easier.

And finally a word of warning, some teachers do introduce penalties

like standing up in class or doing embarrassing things in front of everyone. These may be done light-heartedly and be enjoyed by all, but there are risks involved so it is best for beginner teachers not to become involved in any form of penalty giving and instead concentrate on the positive options that they have.

### **Teacher Talk**

The language that teachers use in the classroom is of crucial importance because in our EFL situation it generally represents the major source of exposure to English that the students receive. Therefore teachers must be aware of the time they spend talking, the affects of speech modification, effective questioning techniques, and the use of praise. Attention to these issues will relate directly to how they are perceived of in the classroom and to how successful they will be as teachers.

*Tempus fugit* is one of the few constants in the classroom and time management always presents a challenge for teachers. How do you allow opportunities for free conversation, introduce new material and provide enough controlled and free practice while still ensuring sufficient flexibility to work with spontaneous student input? This demands a clear ordering of priorities. At the same time teachers need to develop their own teaching style which reflects their personal strengths and view of teaching yet still balances the needs and wishes of the students. They after all have paid money to learn how to speak English, are eager to try and should have every



opportunity to do so!

For new teachers particularly, this translates into a need to be economical with language, talking enough to allow the lesson to flow smoothly, but not dominating the air waves to the exclusion of the students. Conversation is by definition a two way process so lecturing should be avoided. Silence or student interest in a teacher's viewpoint should not be allowed to propel the teacher to centre stage, instead they can be re-focussed on the students. By not succumbing to the pressure of silence and instead allowing a longer response time class participation can actually be improved along with:

- \* Longer student responses
- \* More unsolicited responses from students
- \* Fewer failures to respond
- \* More speculative responses
- \* Increased student-to-student comparison of information
- \* More inferential statements by the students
- \* A greater willingness among the students to ask their own questions

Many students are particularly interested in their teacher's view on issues, but there is a danger that expressing personal opinions can often turn into teacher monologues with little or no student input. Instead such interest should be seen as an additional teaching opportunity, students can be directed to anticipate foreign perspectives, to extensively question the teacher on their views, make comparisons with Japanese beliefs, and debate

or make generalisations on cross cultural differences or the lack of them. In fact, most situations where teachers feel pressured into talking represent additional teaching opportunities. The trick though is to keep focussed on the teaching side of the opportunity as digressions can unintentionally lead off on tangents that have limited usefulness to the students and leave the teacher dominating lesson time.

The quest for utility also poses a number questions on how best to work on student comprehension of classroom language. Some would argue that simplified input where the teacher reduces the difficulty level of grammar and vocabulary being used helps students by reducing the cognitive and linguistic load that they face. Others take the opposite view that elaboration where the teacher builds in redundancy through repetition, paraphrasing and rhetorical questions serves the students better. Both approaches to speech modification have their place in the conversation classroom depending on the level of the class, the way in which they are employed and even just as variations to add extra depth to the instructor's teaching skills.

Of more concern is how the use of speech modifications impact on the student's own sense of accomplishment. Slower speech by the teacher coupled with exaggerated and simplified pronunciation will of course greatly assist lower level students and boost their confidence. Success in even limited conversation stresses the communicative aspects of language and is a very effective motivational factor. Teaching of survival techniques like

asking for rephrasing or repetition of questions will aid the students in actual contact with foreign speakers but anything that eases the initial contact in the teaching situation is critical in maintaining the student's interest in attending classes. Inescapably, student comfort is the bottom line and is of paramount importance. Any technique that keeps a student engaged, who might otherwise have become frustrated and quit classes, is therefore a good technique. There will be opportunities later for the teacher to target specific language areas that have not received adequate attention such as listening skills.

Another issue is how effectively the speech modifications themselves are employed, all too commonly their execution does not match up to the rationale for using them. Simplified speech for example should be just that, grammatically correct but only easier to use and understand. However, in reality it is often reduced to a pidgin-like form of English with articles, objects and prepositions removed in the guise of making sentences simpler. This amounts to a huge disservice to the students, for what are they learning? Certainly nothing of value! Instead teachers need to concentrate on basic skills and use the same language themselves that they expect the students to master. In this way everything that the teacher says is in effect modelling for the students and they can recognise what will be expected of them. By selectively using elaboration in the form of repetition and paraphrasing to support the target language the teacher can then work to maximise the effectiveness of a lesson.

Similarly, questioning by the teacher should be approached as a multi-faceted activity, in its simplest form it may only be a means of checking comprehension of basic information but even then it should offer the students some challenge. Therefore Yes/No questions are to be avoided (unless part of a structured sequential activity) as they achieve little compared to open-ended questions which require more thought on the content and phrasing of the answer. Assessment aside, questions have a role as catalysts to encourage discussion and the sharing of views. This should not only generate active participation with students expressing and justifying their attitudes and beliefs but also show how enjoyable discussion can be. At the same time it is important to be as inclusive as possible and ensure that all students have equal opportunity to speak. This does require special attention for it is all too easy to give more consideration to those students who show greater responsiveness. Even when they cannot answer correctly there is a tendency to stay with such students, repeat the question again, provide clues or even ask a new question. An investment-like situation can occur with teachers placing their time where they feel they will get the best return for their energy.

Linked to the above notion of inclusiveness is the need to have an even-handed approach to student feedback. The same dynamics that seem to affect questioning also appear to have a strong influence on the giving of positive and negative feedback with some studies showing good students getting twice as much praise while lower-achieving students receive three

times the amount of criticism. Obviously no teacher would intentionally set out to do this so it is essential that we are aware of our propensity to such action and develop parameters to operate within. The simplest option being to concentrate on the positive and try to refrain from any criticism. Praise therefore should become the medium for providing most student feedback and assuming that it is distributed equitably it should always:

- \* Be credible - automatic, often repeated phrases soon lose any value
- \* Be timely - given immediately after the event
- \* Clearly state which accomplishment warrants the praise
- \* Recognise effort as well as results
- \* Be supportive of each student's abilities rather than ranking them according to their peers
- \* Draw attention to each student's progress
- \* Encourage students to believe that continued effort will lead to further success in the future
- \* Create a positive attitude toward continued study with emphasis on the enjoyment it brings
- \* Support good study habits

### **Maximising Student Opportunities**

As students are only studying once a week, for an hour and a half, in the case of adults, they are in reality getting less than 75 hours of English over an entire year. If we are to expect noticeable improvement from what is

indeed a very short exposure time, we must look at strategies to maximise student talking time. These start with the basics of creating a good learning environment, ensuring that teacher talk is kept to the minimum and working with techniques that require active participation of all students present.

It is generally regarded that students learn better in relaxed surroundings where they are not pressured to perform or feel at risk if they make errors<sup>1</sup>. Building this environment necessitates finding a balance between a number of competing issues. Not the least being that lessons should be fun, interesting and enjoyable rather than occasions for traditional serious learning. While we can ensure that lessons include activities like vocabulary games and thought provoking puzzles, student involvement in learning activities appears a better means of keeping them interested. Collectively the students represent a huge reservoir of experiences and knowledge that is just waiting for a teacher to tap into. Retelling of personal experiences not only offers language opportunities but also provides *ownership* of the lesson to students while adding personal touches, which promote a sense of community among the learners (and hopefully the teacher too). By allowing lessons to flow with student energy and not necessarily be tied to a text, teachers can ensure student interest and still maintain a focus on language points.

Similarly, the knowledge, not necessarily limited to language details,

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Lewis And Jimmie Hill *Practical Techniques for Language Teaching*, reprinted 1997, Language Teaching Publications, Hove England, 20

that the students possess collectively, provides opportunities for teachers to include everyone in the learning process. Review of previously taught material, vocabulary extension, anticipation of new materials and personal knowledge of lesson topics provide all students with opportunities to participate, giving input to their ability and gaining in confidence with each successful attempt. Here of course it is important that the level is set so that each student can perform to the best of his or her ability and that their contributions are recognised and valued by the teacher. As the saying goes "nothing succeeds like success itself" and so too with learning, students who see that they too can participate in class activities will be more likely to become active class members.

Once student confidence has been built up the next point is to ensure that it is not unnecessarily fractured! All students realise that learning English is no easy task and don't really need negative messages like "English is a very difficult language" or "English grammar is full of irregularities and is often illogical". Instead the teacher needs to concentrate on the achievable. This can be done by choosing materials that are appropriate to student levels and employing a *building blocks* approach that aims at proficiency in individual tasks that can then be combined into more complicated skills areas. Clear goals can be set for students and when necessary unsuitable text based activities can be modified. For example a listening for specific information exercise which is too difficult could be turned into an information building activity where any details are welcomed and later checked for

accuracy by the whole class.

Having addressed learning environment issues teachers must also be aware that at times they can be a disruptive element in their own classrooms. As the *expert* figure, it is very easy to unconsciously dominate events and thereby encroach on student time. This may be a result of our past experiences of traditional teaching, however it is imperative that we move away from a lecturing model and view ourselves more as facilitators who's main task is to create opportunities for students to use English. As such our role is to introduce materials, explain them as clearly and simply as possible, provide ample practice, initiate activities through a combination of concise instructions and effective modelling, and then allow the students space to work with their new skills.

To achieve this there are certain *golden rules* which we should endeavour to follow in our classrooms:

- \* Do not become an active participant in discussions, it is all too easy to dominate them, instead look for ways to direct the discussion so that it flows smoothly and everyone is involved. If pressed, share your views with the class or act as the devil's advocate in order to revitalise the discussion but then step back and leave the activity to the students.

- \* Work with what the students bring to the table, they may have made some errors, but correction of a student's original thinking is generally easier and less confusing than putting words into a student's mouth that may quite easily be grammatically correct though completely different from the



student's intention. Alternatively, using other students to interpret the first student's meaning can achieve the same result without the need for teacher intervention.

\* Be economical with language! The more time spent on giving explanations and instructions for activities means correspondingly less time for the students to practice. For example a common instruction like: "Could you all say that together again please" can be reduced simply to "Again" with accompanying gestures. Over the period of a lesson such time-savings add up to a surprising number of minutes. Similarly precise standardised instructions reduce confusion and therefore down time in a lesson. While teachers giving a running commentary of everything they are doing often has the result of producing sensory overload whereby the students can neither cope with the volume of information nor filter the important details from the incessant chatter.

\*Do not be afraid of silence as all students at some time or other will need more time to recall vocabulary or formulate their ideas and express them in words. By interrupting and offering help with words or ideas the teacher is actually doing students a disservice for each time it is done they are being saved the effort of thinking things out for themselves. Regular *offenders* can come to rely on teachers for assistance and instead it is better to tell them to keep thinking and return to them later.

Now in order to maximise student talking time we have to move away from a teacher centred situation where the instructor plays a pivotal role in

all activities. There is still room for strongly controlled drills such as choral practice of dialogues as they are the most efficient means of working with pronunciation and do address other issues like student comfort while ensuring group participation and reducing problems in follow-on activities. However, as a general rule the emphasis should be on transferring responsibility in the classroom away from the teacher and placing it more squarely on the students.

One option is pair work, which can be employed in any number of ways:

- \*\*As a warm-up activity with students talking about their weekends and then reporting back about the highlights of their partner's Saturday and Sunday.
- \* Dialogue practice with pairs role-playing conversations - however care must be taken to change partners regularly so that the activity doesn't become too boring and repetitive.
- \* Comprehension exercises with the students reading a passage and then asking each other questions in pairs. Variations on this can have each student asking questions about alternating paragraphs from a passage that they have both read or turning it into a listening exercise with one student reading a paragraph, while the other one takes notes and then answers questions about the passage.
- \* Dictation of short passages by the teacher with the pairs working together to create a correct version of the passage.
- \* Question drills done sentence by sentence from a passage with students

alternating paragraph by paragraph.

\* Speed drills of the same material that allow 3-5 seconds for an answer before the next question is asked automatically.

Whichever way pair work is employed the onus remains on the teacher to introduce activities and provide clear and explicit instructions. However, once an activity begins the teacher's role switches to one of monitoring with he or she circulating and giving assistance to individual pairs and only intervening if a sizeable percentage of the class are having difficulties. If the activity goes smoothly the teacher should continue to observe the class to see when everyone has completed the activity as over practice will soon create boredom and can lead to control problems. Once the class has completed the activity one or two pairs should be called upon to repeat the activity as a demonstration of their understanding/ability and to focus everyone's attention that at some point they will all have to produce language in front of the whole class.

A further option in optimising student opportunities is the use of group work. Most of the activities mentioned in pair work can also be modified for use with groups and extended to provide more challenges. For instance:

\* Dialogue work becomes much more demanding when a judge is introduced, not only are the students held accountable for the effort they put into the dialogues, but also as judges they are asked to think more seriously about what constitutes good English. Similarly, if after limited practice of a dialogue,

pairs are asked to repeat the dialogue with books closed and receive assistance from a third student who can only mouth out the words, they soon draw the correlation between mouth shape and pronunciation.

\* Comprehension exercises can be greatly aided as students working together should be able to cover material more effectively as different viewpoints will invariably raise a wide range of questions.

\* Dictation exercises can be delivered more quickly knowing that with a group they should be able to collectively recreate the original without too much difficulty. Here the emphasis is placed more on the process rather than the product. To complete the task the students are required to communicate with each other, discuss options and even debate while the teacher need only list the number of errors in each student's work and let them draw their own conclusions as to the correct format.

One big advantage of group work is that it can be used very effectively for introducing new materials or themes. With larger classes especially this can be difficult as any discussion, brainstorming or similar activity entails a lot of down time for each student. By splitting a class into groups each student has far more opportunity to speak and with discussion activities especially, small group work on set questions allows students to formulate their own ideas before going on to whole group work.

A by-product of both pair work and group work will be increased noise levels, this is an unavoidable symbol of success for it means that the students are talking far, far more than in a traditional teaching situation

where the teacher questions individual students one by one. An added bonus is that dissemination of information and ideas can be smoother for it is easy for students to over-hear what other pairs or groups are doing and use, adapt or expand these ideas as part of their own learning.

### **Student Motivation**

Motivating learners is one of the major tasks facing teachers and requires a considerable investment in effort, for while motivation is largely a personal issue for each student, it is the teacher's responsibility to keep them interested and engaged in learning activities. If the teacher is successful the student's motivation can be maintained and even enhanced. This does however represent a considerable challenge given the rather passive approach that a great number of Japanese students have towards study<sup>2</sup>. A strong feeling of personal responsibility for their own learning has never been a feature of the traditional education system and so there needs to be a combined approach to student motivation. A close, supportive, personal interaction with students whereby the teachers clearly show their commitment to the students, coupled with a consistent demand for high standards of work and supported by enthusiastic presentation of high interest lesson materials is essential in fostering and maintaining an

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<sup>2</sup> Rao Zhenhui, *Matching Teaching Styles with Learning Styles in East Asian Contexts*, available from: <http://www.pep.com.cn/200212/ca37648.htm>; Internet; accessed 29<sup>th</sup> June 2003

atmosphere conducive to student motivation.

A personal connection with students is a critical starting point, as teachers need to gain their students' trust and acceptance that the learning process will at times be a difficult and stressful one. If students believe in their teacher they will be more amenable to follow instructions and invest effort in tasks which otherwise they might have been unwilling to attempt. Success in these tasks serves to build confidence and encourage them to meet the next challenge. Here it is important for the teacher to find the correct balance between difficulty and stress, a moderate level of concern will stimulate effort to learn<sup>3</sup>. While within the class there will be a need to adjust the level of difficulty for particular students, special challenges for some and support and assistance for others. In addition the students also need to see the connection between effort and success, one does not come without the other!

Similarly, success and failure are the opposite sides of the same coin, which require recognition though in differing degrees. It is important that all students, especially the less confident ones, be told of their successes and praised for their effort. The reason being to boost their confidence and to show them that they are capable of succeeding through their own endeavours. While failure has to be dealt with non-judgementally with

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<sup>3</sup> Penny Urr in *Grammar Practice Activities: A practical Guide for Teachers*, Cambridge University Press, 1993, page 23 introduces the idea of pleasurable tension which can contribute to interest in language practice activities. This relates

straightforward explanations of errors and if necessary admonitions that more discipline is required. By being held accountable and being pushed to reach their full potential it is possible to show students the real extent of their abilities.

However, this is no easy task and the process cannot be pushed too quickly or else the students might balk at the pressure they are being put under. A *softly, softly* approach tempered with a mix of interesting materials therefore offers the best means of arousing student interest and maintaining their motivation. Here teacher input is absolutely critical for it is on the combination of good planning, stimulating materials and enthusiastic delivery that success rests. When preparing lessons the following points offer some clues towards arousing and maintaining the necessary levels of student interest:

- \* Activities should have clear goals both from language learning and content perspectives.
- \* *Variety is the spice of life* when selecting activities and materials, ensure as wide a variation as possible and try to surprise the students.
- \* Wherever possible try incorporate visuals and regalia into the lesson.
- \* Challenge, competition and tension can all add excitement to activities in the form of time limits, team competitions, quizzes and presentations.
- \* All teachers are, in a way entertainers either through the force of their personality or the activities they arrange. If lessons are entertaining the

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to the use of games but is akin to the challenge of difficult but achievable tasks.

students will enjoy them, be more relaxed and receptive and this will add to their motivation.

\* Role-plays if well prepared offer the majority of students opportunities to use their imagination and escape some of their inhibitions.

\* Information gap activities provide interesting and realistic opportunities to exchange information in pairs and as teacher-centred lateral thinking exercises they promote analytical thinking.

\* Wherever possible tasks and especially discussions, should be personalised to include student experiences and opinions. Similarly, when choosing issues, students will be more familiar and therefore more responsive to Japanese issues or foreign ones that draw comparison with Japan.

\* Open-ended questions allow for a wider range of answers with more personal content.

And finally it is helpful to look at classroom situations that affect the attention span of students. Here the key point is keeping the students focused, if teachers are explaining something then they should continually scan the class so as to maintain eye contact with as many students as possible. The white board can be used to concentrate everyone's attention on important details, which should then be copied down. The use of texts and dictionaries can be controlled by the teacher with the students referring to them only as directed, otherwise the group focus can be lost and the classroom becomes a collection of individuals often working in different directions. Activities should be explained prior to the giving out of material so



that everyone's attention is on the explanation rather than split between the teacher and the material. Pair work and group activities have to be continually monitored to make sure that all the students remain on track.

### **Body Language and Voice Delivery**

As conversation teaching involves close personal contact with a relatively small group of people the teacher's body language plays an important role in developing a positive relationship with the students. The importance of eye contact is clear from a feedback perspective, in that any confusion or lack of understanding is easily seen in students' eyes. Similarly, teachers are also providing a portrait of themselves to their students, which can just as easily be read by those in the classroom. Lack of eye contact or wandering attention such as clock watching or constant reference to notes or text can create a feeling of indifference towards the students while even more blatant activities like yawning or ignoring certain students will obviously create a negative image.

If we are to consider what equates to good body language we should look beyond the traditional teacher student relationship, which is a decidedly hierarchical one and reflect upon how we interact with our friends. For our students are not attending classes purely for English exposure and we do tend to be at our best in our interactions with those we like. Eye contact is steadily maintained and our body language expresses our interest and intimacy, we move forward in our seats, shortening the distance between us

and gesture dramatically with our hands. In addition our tone of voice fluctuates, expressing our emotions, be they interest, humour, incredulity, disbelief, wonder, and if necessary boredom. In essence we express our humanness! This is what we should be aiming at in our classrooms too.

However our approach to body language should not just be limited to its role in developing a closer relationship with our students for it is also one of our key teaching tools. Gestures can be a far more succinct and easily understood method of giving instructions or highlighting errors than oral directions. A simple wagging of an index finger can indicate an error, followed by signalling with one's fingers while repeating an incorrect phrase to identify the location of the error. Circles can be made in the air with an outstretched finger to convey that a student should repeat something or individual students can simply be pointed to, to indicate turn taking or roles for role-plays. Eye contact can also achieve some of the same results and all of this can be done with a minimum of disruption to the flow of the lesson.

Fortunately there are no cultural taboos about pointing with your hands (though feet are another matter), but with a majority of female students we should be aware that male teachers particularly must be careful not to unintentionally intimidate their students. Open handed gestures with the palms up are less likely to appear aggressive and both eye contact and personal space must be monitored so as not to create discomfort.

At the same time we should think of our voices as instruments of our language and play them accordingly. Through pauses, stress and changes of

intonation we are able to express a wide range of nuances and emotions which offer students untold opportunities to *play* with the language as they are learning it. They can experience *real language* and *real language opportunities* and enjoy acting out scenarios, which they would otherwise feel inhibited doing in Japanese. These are however skills that need working on and require a 100% investment by the teacher in order to achieve a 60-70% return from the students.

Theatrics aside, these same voice skills are also useful for stressing and clarifying points or information for students, for example:

- \* Pausing to note changes as the teacher switches from explanation to giving examples and on to practice.
- \* Highlighting changes in usage by emphasising the differences in language.
- \* Stressing grammatical rules to make students more aware of where they are making errors.

Students often take more notice of these oral cues than written notes and respond or self correct before the teacher can complete giving their advice. They serve to refresh the students' memories yet still allow the students integrity to work through language difficulties themselves.

And finally, tone of voice offers flexible responses to classroom situations, whether it is to jokingly keep students on target with activities or to pre-empt misbehaviour on the part of hyperactive children.

## The Use of Questions

Many teachers devote a considerable percentage of their lesson time to questioning, both teacher and student directed, in the belief that the skills involved are indispensable for the development of their students' communication abilities. Whilst this is indeed important, it overlooks the value of questioning as a strategy to promote student learning and motivation. Through questioning teachers can assess their students' current understanding of materials, anticipate problem areas, challenge them to think more and integrate their new learning within the bounds of their current knowledge.

The effective use of questioning demands that it be employed routinely in all learning activities to maximise everyone's involvement in the lesson. This requires determination on the part of the teacher to ensure that all students participate equally in the questioning process rather than just a confident few. Initially this will present difficulties as lower ability students will be unwilling to answer but unless they are *compelled* to, they will remain outside the flow of the lesson and be more likely to become inattentive and lose motivation. One technique for facilitating their inclusion is the use of prompting, where the teacher helps students by providing hints to the answer, rewording the question so that it is more understandable, or asking a series of easier questions that lead to the answer. This has the added advantage of creating a positive atmosphere in the classroom and signalling the student that they will succeed. Not only is the student assisted through

the thought process but the whole class is also given the opportunity to examine their own thinking.

In this way the pressure is taken off the student and the teacher has opportunities to add extra information or clarify misunderstandings that may also be influencing other students too. In addition important details can be stressed to everyone's advantage and the teacher has more flexibility to work with points within a student's answer that may have been correct. Another option, is the use of repetition questions where instead of teachers repeating information, they address questions to the class and have the students provide the emphasis themselves. This also creates opportunities for greater student participation and allows teachers to check if the students have been following the content of the lesson. And as an extra bonus, once the students realise that they may be called upon at any time to answer questions their attention will improve significantly.

However for this increased emphasis on questioning to work effectively it is most important that *waiting time* be introduced and employed properly. All too often teachers don't allow students enough time to formulate answers, interrupt them, answer for them or simply move on to another student. This is particularly true for interactions with lower level students, but by allowing them more time to think it is possible to greatly increase the quality and quantity of their responses. Effective waiting time requires the teacher to introduce three pauses into the questioning process. First, the teacher asks the question and allows time for everyone to think

about it and put together an answer. Then a student is chosen and given time to provide an answer. Finally once the answer is complete a further pause allows the student to add more details or self correct and for the other students to consider the answer and respond if necessary. Of course if the student is having difficulties, prompting can be used after the second pause with waiting time being allowed after each question.

The actual length of the waiting time will vary according to the level of the students and the difficulty of the questions but the teacher should be looking at times of around 5 seconds (or more). Despite this seeming quite a long time the end result should be a smoother and more focused lesson with better student responses. Other benefits should include greater participation by all students and fewer cases of misbehaviour. Over a period of time there should not only be noticeable gains in English abilities but also greater teacher awareness of student needs as they match questions and waiting time to the students levels. This extra investment in individual students has the further advantage of signalling the teacher's confidence in and commitment to all the students, in the certain expectation that they will succeed in their studies.

At this point it is helpful to look at the kind of questions being asked of the students. By using *open-ended* questions, which require the students to explain about something or remember past details, and allow a variety of answers, teachers offer all students safe opportunities to participate and succeed in lessons. This is particularly useful for warm-up activities and the

introduction of new materials as it enables students to contribute using their prior knowledge. For teachers too, it provides a quick and simple vehicle for involving as many students as possible in an activity, while still allowing assessment of their understanding of the topic. Should the teacher need to direct the attention of the students more, this can be achieved through asking them to compare and contrast particular points. The range of acceptable answers will be narrower but students will continue to have flexibility in making their responses. An information base can be built up in this way for later use with more focused comprehension questions requiring students to show their grasp of details through paraphrasing, explanations and extension of ideas.

With more advanced students, a wider range of questions are available for teachers to sustain the challenge to both their language abilities and intellect. As alluded to above there exists a hierarchical sequence to questioning, which can assist teachers in ordering the sequence and therefore the effectiveness of their questions. By working through the order in a building blocks manner, using prior knowledge and acquired skills from each previous stage to advance to the next, it is possible to achieve greater success with high-level questions. Teachers should start with basic *knowledge* level questions that require students to recall or define information gathered from past experience or instruction. Then, the teacher can move on to *comprehension* questions, which ask students to show their understanding of the information by summarising details in their own words,

giving original examples or providing their own examples. The next stage, *application* questions sees students applying information they have just learned to a new situation. These can be followed by *analysis* questions working on the students' ability to examine information, separate out the salient points and specify the relationships between them. *Synthesis* questions then go a further step by asking students to use all the information they have gathered to create something original of their own, like a solution to a particular problem. Finally, *evaluation* questions require them to pass judgement, possibly evaluating both the good and bad points of a solution arrived at in the previous stage. In this way the challenge is being maintained without pushing students beyond their comfort levels or the bounds of their knowledge.

### **Multilevel Classes**

It is an inescapable fact of teaching that multilevel classes will always be a feature of small scale conversation school operation and the onus is on teachers to develop strategies that can take into account both the positive and negative facets of these classes. Fortunately, close attention to sound teaching practices and small class sizes make this task less difficult than might at first be imagined. The first steps though should be an understanding of the reasons why multilevel classes exist and the need for flexibility to work with a less-than-perfect situation.

By definition small schools draw on a limited population base and



therefore cannot offer the range of classes, which would allow for more clearly defined class levels. As a result students may be grouped together somewhat randomly based on their stated level, their availability (convenient lesson times), ages and staff scheduling. This reflects the school's need to first be responsive to the convenience of the students and then to provide the best level of teaching possible. Unfortunately, there are many variables that influence the make up of classes. The convenience for mothers of being able to have two children study in the same class; the comfort of being able to study with friends or people of similar ages (despite known level differences); the availability of inexpensive and subsidised community classes; the challenge of studying with better students; the availability of a popular teacher or one with good Japanese skills and even purely economic considerations such as the need to combine classes that no longer have viable numbers.

Even once classes have been created there are ongoing factors which will influence the operation of a class, students all have different learning styles, learn at differing speeds and may have irregular attendance due to outside commitments such as club activities, exams or pressures of work. This situation is further aggravated by *open entry* to classes, which allows new students to join a class at any time. As a result certain students will have *knowledge gaps* through having missed previous lessons or will be unfamiliar with the routines and expectations of a class and it's teacher.

Unfortunately, there is no *quick fix* for the problems that face the

teacher, no all encompassing technique or text will make life easier and teachers should look towards being well prepared and creating an environment which is supportive and reassuring for the students. If the students view the classroom as a friendly, low risk setting they will be more confident to meet the challenges of a lesson. At the same time there are certain intrinsic advantages to multilevel classes, which should not be overlooked. The presence of more advanced students allows the teacher greater flexibility in organising activities, for example many activities work better when there are more advanced students to lead questioning or take dominant parts in role-plays. These same students are also useful for introducing and modelling new activities and provide a convenient *knowledge bank*, which can be tapped to explain difficult concepts or vocabulary. Even with quite diverse abilities there are positive aspects in that stronger students are available to help less capable students. This can free up the teacher to monitor the whole class' progress, while still allowing the weaker students personal attention and giving the more advanced students an opportunity to demonstrate their greater skill and polish it through explaining to others. As an added bonus, particularly with adults, diversity of age and experience can help foster a sense of community in a class and even enliven activities, as viewpoints will tend to span a wider spectrum.

In preparing for a lesson it is therefore important to set broad achievable goals that allow each student to challenge their abilities and yet provide opportunities for them to work smoothly within a single class

structure. This requires a flexible approach by the teacher through the choice of activities that let everyone contribute but place different expectations on each student. For example, the standard warm-up of "What did you do in the weekend?" generally serves to encourage familiarity among the students. While weaker students may work on basic grammar structures and general listening skills, better students should be called upon to give detailed accounts using more grammatical flair and wider vocabulary knowledge. Extra challenges can be added by requiring paraphrasing for the other students and the asking of comprehension questions that demand more detailed information or the use of deduction and anticipation. Similarly with other activities, be they picture description, dictation, choral practice, dialogue work, discussion or writing, the degrees of accuracy and fluency expected of each student should differ according to their ability. Fortunately, because our small class sizes this presents a fairly manageable task. Teachers need only assess and guide an average of about four to six students at a time and with judicious use of whole class, small group and pair work activities most of the difficulties associated with multilevel classes can be overcome.

Rather than resorting to splitting a class and teaching two separate lessons at once it is better to look at ways of maximising inclusion and reducing frustration among the students. This can best be achieved by first showing them that they can work together despite their level differences and that each student's input is valued. Here it is critical that the teacher sets the

atmosphere for the class by ensuring that everyone is welcome and by trying to promote a co-operative spirit among the students with emphasis on each student's improvement rather than comparisons with others in the class. At the same time the students must be aware that they are expected to actively participate in class and take responsibility for their own learning. On a practical level this will require them to work with different partners, complete any homework required of them and always try to the best of their ability.

Careful choice of activities can aid this process, particularly the use of whole class activities that maximise interaction among the students. Initially these are community building exercises, and through talking about weekend events, hobbies or skills individual students have; filling out and discussing questionnaires; and showing family or holiday photos, students are able to learn more about their classmates. They can develop a personal appreciation of them, rather than view them simply as someone they happen to share time and space with. Successful bonding can thereby set the foundation for smoother operation of multilevel classes.

Immediate success with the language content of these activities is not to be expected of all students though, rather the teacher should allow them a fair degree of latitude with the stronger ones practising their speaking and listening skills and providing realistic models for the other students. They in turn will work with the material at whichever level they feel confident and as their understanding increases so too should their ability to participate. This process can be assisted by the teacher ensuring that such conversations

remain firmly connected to the students' world and do not wander into realms that not everyone is familiar with. Similarly, when working with hobbies or skills that students may have, it is important that they be dealt with practically. Wherever possible activities should reflect hands-on experience, this could vary from how to use an SLR camera to step by step role playing of the creation of the perfect sandwich or any other culinary delight that comes to mind. Where questions are being asked, their degree of difficulty should be graded to allow all students an opportunity to succeed. Simple yes/no questions followed up by ones that require one-word answers maximise everyone's participation and still leave room for more difficult questions to be addressed to the better students.

Further opportunities to cement class bonding can come from working together on problem solving tasks. *Mystery objects*, using a twenty questions like format ensure that everyone has valuable input, especially if all the students are recommended to write down the questions for future reference and the activity is made a regular feature of lessons. While for smaller groups a combination of simple tasks, which build into a more complicated exercise will provide practice of different skills and ensure greater interaction. For example, the teacher can randomly distribute single frames of a humorous cartoon strip story to the students and have them each write a short description of their frame. The teacher can check them for grammatical errors and then have the class dictate their descriptions to one another and decide upon the correct order of the frames.

However, as with most levels of conversation classes, pair work should remain the major vehicle for student interaction. It maximises each student's opportunity to participate and at the same time should reduce stress by limiting a student's audience to one, a partner who can help complete tasks and also provide support when activities are not understood. The problem though is how best to organise pair work within the limitations of a multilevel class. It is easy for stronger students to dominate events or become frustrated with their partners while they in turn may tend to acquiesce too easily or lose their enthusiasm when faced with such a daunting classmate. Even less challenged students may have different learning styles which conflict with others, the dictionary grammarian verses the energetic *let's try it* learner or the reclusive, *slow and steady* student. The solution lies in adaptability and flexibility, both on the part of the teacher and the students as well. Decisions have to be made on how best to organise students for pair work, to have them work in equal ability pairs or pairs with mixed abilities, and how best to adapt activities and materials to match the make-up of each pair. While the students have to be prepared to work with different partners and handle differing demands being placed on them.

Equal ability pairs provide possibly the easiest option for the teacher but within any class there could be a wide range of abilities which have to be addressed to prevent some students falling behind or others finishing too soon and either becoming bored or disruptive. Keeping all the students engaged is therefore crucial and as dialogues and role-plays especially tend

to be the mainstay of conversation classes it is important to look at ways to ensure these activities work effectively. Good presentation and choral practice provide the corner stones for successful use of dialogues, creating a meaningful context and allowing safe controlled practice of target language with time to build fluency and confidence. Then depending on each pair's ability the use of dialogues and role-plays can be tailored to their level.

At the easiest level students can continue to work on their fluency without the controlling presence of the teacher and begin to introduce some of the elements of role-play with the use of eye contact, body language and movement. As confidence increases they can continue working with the dialogue but with their texts closed and using more dramatic interpretation of the dialogue. This of course will depend on the personality of each student but generally Japanese students respond well to this challenge as their acting ability rather than their English ability is being put on show, everyone is on a more equal footing and less of their actual persona is at risk. At the same time, extra energy is being put into the *acting* and the language content often improves without conscious effort.

Level Two could introduce simple substitutions as used in Audio Lingual texts such as the New American Streamline Departure series Unit # 39:

- A) "Would you like to come to a party?"      B) "Well, I'd like to. But when is it?"

A) "On Saturday evening."

B) "What a pity! I'm busy on  
Saturday."

A) "What are you doing?"

B) "I'm doing my homework."

A) "Really! Another time perhaps." B) "Yes, thanks anyway."

Substitutions: \* A party, a dance, a picnic, a pop concert, a football  
match  
\* Saturday, Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday,  
Thursday, Friday

Level Three could see the introduction of a listening element to add an extra challenge and greater realism to the activity. For example the dialogue could be re-written to provide a choice of responses to statements or questions raised by either partner.

A) "Would you like to come to a  
party?"

B) "Well, I'd like to ... but when  
is it?"

B) "Well, I'm busy studying for  
exams now."

A) "On Saturday evening."

B) "Yeah, I'd love to!"

B) "What a pity! I'm busy on  
Saturday."



**A)** "What are you doing?"

**B)** "I'm going out to lunch with  
my cousin."

**B)** "I'm doing my homework."

**A)** "Really! Another time perhaps?" **B)** "Yes, thanks anyway."

This dialogue has response options only for "B", but depending on the dialogue and time, options could be introduced for both speakers.

At Level Four students could be expected to interpret the dialogue more by adapting it to reflect a variety of social situations, differing levels of formality and personality. How would the same dialogue be approached in a business setting where someone must entertain an overseas client? What activities would be appropriate and what level of persuasion could be politely used? Similarly, each speaker could be assigned a set character (shy, humorous, forgetful or demanding) and have to reinterpret the dialogue accordingly. For the most advanced students, they could be given a scenario from which to create their own role-play. Depending on their inventiveness, they could work from individualised information sheets in a kind of jigsaw activity or they might even prepare an original script from their own imagination.

Other pair work activities can similarly be graded to facilitate their use by equal ability pairs within a multilevel class. Information gap exercises provide an interesting challenge with students having to ask their partners questions to discover information missing from their study sheets. Eventually

both partners will possess an identical list of facts. In its simplest form both students, work from the same basic information sheet, which only differs in the details blanked out. To add a little more difficulty the sheets can be rewritten so that the information is presented in a different order and the entire text must be searched each time to find the relevant facts. Further challenges can be added by changing the format of the information to a timetable, an appointment diary, a dialogue, an article, an advertisement or a letter and then giving each partner information in a different format. For more advanced students alternative vocabulary and phrases can be used to further test their level of understanding.

There are also a wide variety of games, pictures and puzzles that lend themselves to similar usage and can be tuned to each pair's level by adjusting the degree of difficulty required to complete the tasks. Often the easiest solution is simply to reduce the amount of materials being used, thereby making the students' options easier. Conversely, adding more options or details while still requiring all the students to finish within a set time should make the challenge equal for all class members. Activities that lend themselves to this approach include:

- Picture cards where students must identify pairs through oral descriptions, the greater the detail in the pictures, the more difficult the task becomes.
- Picture dictation where one student must draw a picture from their partner's description. Again, the better the student the more accuracy demanded in the drawing. Transcribing map details provides a variation on

this theme.

- Story telling from picture cards based for example on fairy tale or science fiction genres with the cards either displayed or dealt out to each partner. A written record of the story will add a new dimension of difficulty to the task.
- A picture information gap where students compile a complete picture by comparing the details in their copies. Alternatively, there are materials where the students must identify differences between their pictures and possibly provide a written list of them.

Questionnaires also offer another flexible option for the teacher, being useful as either an introduction to a theme or as tool for practice. When they are set up properly they not only allow the students to work at their own level, but also help free up the teacher to monitor those who need extra help. To be most effective questionnaires should be divided into sections, with the first reviewing personal information and introducing the theme of the interview with a few simple questions. The second section should deal with factual details that can be answered with single words or short phrases while the third section can explore ideas, opinions and experiences in more detail. Once the students have had time to read through the questionnaire they can proceed with the activity at their own pace and whilst they may not complete it, all the class should be kept fully engaged. Invariably, the weaker students will need assistance, but by dividing the questionnaire into sections the teacher should have more time to work with the weaker students before needing to help the stronger students and each level can be practising while

the other is being helped. Meanwhile the more advanced students can be spending a comparatively longer time working on the more demanding third section.

However, there will be times when dividing the students into equal ability pairs is not practical or in the greater interest of the class. The old adage that "a change is as good as a rest", holds true in the classroom too and the jolt of working with a new more *difficult* partner can hold advantages for both people. For the more advanced student it can be the responsibility of largely controlling the situation and ensuring their partner does in fact understand them, while for the weaker student they are constantly being challenged and need to develop strategies that allow them to function in this environment.

Fortunately for the teacher the change in dynamics does not require a major change of approach. For dialogue and role-play work, the selection of material and situations needs to reflect the dominant role of one student. It is that person who must take the lead by displaying high levels of fluency and accuracy which provide good models for their partner and keep challenging them to extend their comfort zone. Many other activities can be simply modified by *mixing and matching* existing materials. Information gap exercises should still function well with one student using a basic information sheet while the other works from an advertisement or an article. A further challenge can be introduced for the advanced student by using academic or technical language that requires simplification for their partner to

understand.

Another easy option is to use a longer, more detailed text that requires the stronger student to filter out unnecessary information. If teachers are preparing their own materials this allows *engineering* of the texts to help the weaker student by always placing answers in the first sentence of any paragraph while the stronger student's answers are near the end of each paragraph and compel them to read the entire text. With puzzles and games the stronger student needs to take a more teacher like role, explaining the activity and if necessary leading their partner through it. The effort they put in will be proportional to the ability difference between the two students. Similarly, questionnaires and activities like Twenty Questions and Mystery Objects can require the stronger partner to do the quizzing and specifically structure their questions in the most suitable way for their partner to understand. Even the relatively simple task of asking that all questions have a Yes/No answer format will ensure that both partners are working to their best abilities.

Similarly, with listening activities different expectations can be placed on the students with weaker students being allowed to provide single word answers while stronger students must use full phrases or fill in more details. When checking answers or comprehension of details teachers can target different listening skills ranging from the ability to follow general themes through to understanding specific details and on to the more difficult areas of recognising a speaker's intention and attitude.

## **Student Feedback**

Feedback is the process whereby we get responses to our teaching which allow us to judge whether our teaching has been effective or not. This feedback comes in a number of forms that can best be categorised according to their sources. Teacher feedback, which is a vital part of the observation process during training; official student feedback in reply to annual school questionnaires; teacher generated feedback activities; and general classroom feedback. All of these are important, though in reality the bulk of the feedback that we receive is unofficial, in the form of body language, background chatter, silence and target language production that we see every day in our classes.

It would be easy if feedback was a straightforward process but unfortunately it will never be so. The first feedback you receive will be in the form of peer observation during your initial training when the training teacher will discuss the progress of your lessons. The intention here being to offer advice on the application of teaching techniques, classroom management and interaction with the students from the viewpoint of another teacher with more experience. This is by necessity filtered, as trainee teachers already have to cope with a great deal of new formation.

Student feedback, via both official questionnaires and teacher generated feedback activities are unfortunately not as accurate diviners of teacher performance, as might be hoped, for they tend to suffer from the influence of the Japanese sense of *honne and tatemae* according to which

Japanese people maintain two views of everything. The *honne* or personal version of truth and the *tatemae* answer, which best reflects the expectations of the questioner. These different viewpoints are not an attempt to distort the truth but rather a mechanism for promoting harmony in a crowded society. While they don't totally negate the value of such feedback, an understanding of *honne* and *tatemae* does allow us to better focus the intention of our feedback activities.

Several possibilities are available including structured feedback sheets, which should include some appraisal of the teacher, some self-appraisal by the student and positive suggestions about the class. A less structured activity would be to give the students coloured cards ranging from a cold blue to a hot red and have them show their feelings about the lesson or activities by flashing their card, soccer referee style, it works well with children's classes.

Unfortunately, there is very little direct feedback other than in attendance figures, contented students are nearly always present and less happy students tend to have intermittent attendance prior to their unheralded departure. Often no notification will be given until their repeated absence has been noted, or they will cite poor health or pressure of work as reasons for stopping the class. This face saving mechanism thereby allows the social graces to be maintained. Occasionally students will avail themselves of an *ura michi* or backdoor communications where friends of friends will pass on information about their unhappiness with lessons to other

teachers or management.

Another reason for this lack of student to teacher communication is that many students themselves don't have any clear expectations of the class or serious thoughts regarding their own responsibilities as learners. English fluency has long been regarded as an admirable skill to have and while it is now easily within their grasp financially it remains a somewhat ethereal skill for which in typical Japanese manner they are willing to leave all matters in the capable hands of the teacher.

As a result the onus is on the teacher to read all that is occurring in the classroom and interpret it accordingly. There are the obvious verbal cues like:

"*wakaranai*" or "*shiranai*" that translate into "I have no idea."

"*doyu imi*" "What do you mean?"

Similarly, the blank stares are easy to recognise. More difficult to recognise is the barrage of Japanese that may occur whenever you give instructions or talk for any length of time. This may simply be the students conferring to check their understanding of what you have said or it may be total confusion regarding the instructions. The best course here is to ensure that all instructions are given clearly and simply and that they are followed up with modelling and controlled practice before having the students work independently.

Simply asking if students understand or have any questions would



appear the most straightforward way to ensure that they understand study materials, however there is often a reluctance to interrupt the class with questions or to show a lack of understanding. The aforementioned *honne* and *tatemae* comes into play here with the students not wanting to upset the teacher's lesson. Checking comprehension before proceeding is the best way to reduce possible areas of confusion and at the same time ensuring that the students are aware of and proficient in survival techniques such as:

"How do you say that in English?" You don't know how to say a word  
in English.

"How would you spell it?" You don't know how to write a  
word.

"What does that mean?" You don't know the meaning of a  
word.

"Could you repeat that?" You want someone to say  
something again.

"I don't know." You don't know the answer to a  
question.

"Did you say ....(A).. or ..(B) ..?" You aren't sure what you heard.

"I don't understand."

"Pardon."

"Excuse me?"

Once the students are comfortable with these questions and recognise both the teacher's expectations and the advantages of using these questions

lessons should flow more smoothly. However, there will always be a need for the teacher to check that students really understand what is happening in the lesson. Loss of eye contact is one of the surest clues of wandering attention, close attention should allow a teacher to identify those students having problems and even pinpoint the time that they became lost or confused. To clarify the situation specific questions can be asked about the information or an explanation can just be given. As these questions are not intended to test the students' language ability but to clarify understanding they should be short and simple with correspondingly easy answers. Any difficulties should then be immediately apparent and quickly dealt with and filed away for reference so that future difficulties or misunderstandings can be anticipated and prevented.

## **5. Appendixes**

### **A Teaching Approaches**

To begin with I would like to look briefly at some of the *approaches* to instruction that are commonly in use today, for teaching reflects the myriad of ideas and beliefs that exist in our modern society. Unfortunately, there is no one way to teach, nor any methodology that will allow us to become perfect teachers. The world around us is neither black nor white but rather varying shades of grey and so too is teaching.

Please read through the following introductions to the approaches that I have selected and consider which approach or which features of the various approaches appeal to you the most.

#### **The Grammar Translation Method**

This is the traditional method that has been employed in schools for decades to introduce students to foreign language literature. The emphasis is on reading and writing skills with the intention solely of expanding the students' intellect rather than providing them with communication skills in the language.

The students work with written passages that contain the grammatical structures and vocabulary to be studied. These passages are translated with emphasis on idiomatic accuracy and are used as the basis of comprehension activities in the target language. Often questions are sequenced with the initial questions targeting information contained in the written passage, followed by questions that require the students to make inferences based on their understanding of the passage and then finally questions which ask them to relate the passage to their own experience.

While the target language is actively used here most instruction is given in the students' native language with translation providing equivalents for all target language words. These must then be memorised along with grammatical rules and verb conjugations. Once this has been done students must be able to apply specific grammar rules to examples and produce sentences to show their understanding of the new vocabulary. In addition fill-in-the-blanks exercises provide further practice followed by written compositions using the target language or written paraphrasing of the original reading passage.

The lesson is therefore by definition very teacher centred with little student initiation or student-to-student interaction. Student feelings are not directly addressed and correction is more an issue of ensuring that students know and get the correct answer - if they make errors or don't know an answer the teacher simply provides them with the correct answer.

## **The Audio Lingual Method**

This method places far more emphasis on oral skills in the belief that the best way to learn a language is to emulate the order in which we acquired our own native language i.e. first through listening, then speaking, followed by reading and lastly writing. Similarly, grammatical rules need not be memorised, as they will be acquired with regular use that is ensured by repeated drills.

Central to this method is the memorisation of dialogues, which contain the sentence patterns and grammar points to be studied. Without recourse to the students' native language the teacher sets the scene for a dialogue which is presented energetically and practised line by line with careful attention to pronunciation and intonation. This repetition or choral practice is supported by a multitude of drills - backward build-up drills which reverse the order of a sentence to facilitate easier memorisation; chain drills in which a student is asked questions and then repeats the questions to another student who in turn asks the questions to a third student; substitution drills in which words or phrases must be added into sentences in the correct forms; transformation drills in which sentences are changed from positive to negative, statements to questions, direct to reported speech and tense to tense; and quick fire question and answer drills.

This concentration on repetition and drills is based on the belief that language learning is a process of habit formation and that the more practice students have the better they will become. By "over learning" they will be able to answer automatically without having to stop or think and with the use of praise as positive reinforcement the students will develop good language habits. Similarly, errors should be prevented through anticipation of problem areas or dealt with immediately so that bad habits cannot develop.

## **The Silent Way**

The Silent Way approaches teaching from a different direction, asking students to think for themselves, to work out language rules and to be responsible for their own learning. They are regarded as intelligent beings who have already mastered one language and bring with them knowledge that can be applied to another. The teacher's role therefore is to guide the students, to focus their attention and ensure the necessary practice, i.e. "... to work with the student, while the student works on the language."

This entails the use of sound-colour charts, which introduce beginners to the particular sounds of a language and the setting up of situations to focus student attention on particular grammatical structures. Teachers give clues, but do not model language, instead, they work on student autonomy by guiding the students in the right direction and allowing them to make their own decisions. Silence is used here as a powerful tool to promote thought with gestures to indicate everything from the length of vowel sounds

to the location of errors in sentences. Mistakes may occur but are viewed as an integral part of the learning process that must be treated non judgementally, with neither praise nor criticism, in case they hinder the establishment of the student's own inner criteria for making language choices. These errors also allow teachers to assess student understanding and direct the lesson accordingly, with emphasis on steady progress rather than perfection. At the same time students are encouraged to self correct or look to their peers for support in what is hoped to be a co-operative environment.

Practice is seen as an important part of learning with previously introduced structures being continually recycled and used in a building blocks manner to extend the students' knowledge. Grammar rules become evident from their usage and all four skills are employed to reinforce learning, though more importance is placed on oral skills as the primary form of language. Then at the end of each lesson students are asked to give structured feedback about the lesson and their own learning, to identify what they have learned, what problems they are having and any negative feelings that may exist. These are all accepted by the teacher and where applicable incorporated into the next lesson to ensure that the teacher remains responsive to the students' immediate learning needs.

### **The Total Physical Response Method**

This method places primary importance on listening comprehension and responses to commands in emulation of how young children acquire language. The theory being that children spend their first year listening to the language around them, gradually understanding more and then start speaking when they are ready. By not rushing the process and allowing learners this same freedom to start speaking when they choose, it is hoped that students will feel more comfortable and open to learning.

The main technique used is the command, the teacher works first with a small group of students, giving a command and then modelling it for them. Both teacher and students work together until the students can perform the actions alone and the rest of the class can demonstrate some understanding of them. This combination of language and movement utilises the right side of the brain instead of the usual language centre in the left and sees memory being activated through the associated actions. Learning tends therefore to be less stressful and this is further assisted by a relaxed attitude to mistakes with only major errors receiving discreet correction.

In the next stage the commands are rearranged for further practice so as to prevent the memorisation of sequences. Confident students then have an opportunity to lead the class through a series of commands that can become longer and more complicated. Once they have shown proficiency the teacher then introduces reading and writing skills to the students.

## **The Communicative Approach**

The most important principle of the communicative approach is the notion that language is a vehicle for real communication rather than just an object of study. Language is viewed as always having a purpose: to negotiate, explain, gather information or even simply socialise and each instance has its own particular social context which requires understanding of specific nuances. Therefore the students' capabilities should not be limited to language forms, meanings and functions but must encompass the wider skill of being able to negotiate meaning with those they are conversing with. Through continually assessing responses and adjusting their replies, students will be able to communicate effectively.

This emphasis on "real world" language skills sees stress placed on the use of authentic materials such as newspaper articles, official documents and radio or TV programmes. Communicative opportunities are maximised with activities like games, cartoon story telling, unscrambling sentences and problem solving which all feature information gaps, choice of language and feedback to other participants. These activities also require students to practice working together and share information as they progress towards common goals. Further opportunities are provided by role-plays where students practice realistic communicative tasks set in a variety of social situations where they can explore the differing relationships between people.

Throughout this process the teacher acts as a facilitator, managing classroom activities, assisting the students to express their opinions and transferring as much responsibility for communication as possible to the students themselves. Inevitably errors will occur but weaknesses in language structures and vocabulary are not necessarily seen as hindrances to communication if students respond to the interactions occurring around them.

## **B** Sample Adult Lesson Plans

### Lesson Plan I

Class: Monday 7:30 ~ 1.5 hour lesson

Level: Beginner

Text: Streamline Departures

Page: Unit # 6 "There's a nice apartment"

Goal: Description of apartment/ room

Key Forms/ Focus: ~ Use of "there is/ are ..... a/ some/ no/ any ..."  
in statement and question forms  
~ Prepositions of place

#### START:

- Weekend Activities ~ "What have been doing?"
- Elicit as many prepositions of place as the students know
  - ~ Draw a picture on the white board and have the students name the preposition
  - ~ Ask a student to draw another picture of a preposition and have the class identify it
  - ~ Repeat until they have drawn all the prepositions they know
  - ~ Fill in any knowledge gaps
- Hand out copies of page 10 from Play Games With English of "Where are the Mice?"
  - ~ Number all the mice using Japanese descriptions of their locations or pre number the mice when photocopying
  - ~ Elicit from class the position of each mouse using the following form: "There is a mouse ....."
  - ~ Choral drill the locations of all sixteen mice
  - ~ Speed drill the class rotating the starting student each time so that they practice all the variations, give achievable targets and reduce as they get faster
  - ~ Pair work practice - one student points to a mouse and asks:  
"Where is the mouse?" Response : "It is ....."
  - ~ Repeat speed drill
  - ~ Offer individual speed tests
  - ~ For fun - ask the fastest student to do the speed drill in Japanese and compare the times. Both languages use the same number of words and often the English is faster - a good confidence booster.

- have a race between the fastest student in Japanese and the teacher
- Brainstorm vocabulary about houses or apartments, list on white board.
- Open text and introduce 1st dialogue
  - ~ Teacher presents dialogue
  - ~ Choral practice using whole class and half classes for each speaker
  - ~ Any questions
  - ~ Pair work practice
  - ~ Role play
  - ~ Apartment description:
    - ~ "There is a ..... (room)".
    - ~ Question form – "Is there a ..... (room)?"  
"Yes, there is. / No, there isn't."
  - ~ Students' own houses or apartments
  - ~ Teacher presents 2nd dialogue
  - ~ Choral practice using whole class and half classes for each speaker
  - ~ Any questions
  - ~ Pair work practice
  - ~ Role play
  - ~ Elicit descriptions of the kitchen and living room shown in the text using:
    - "There is a ....."                    **or** "There are some ....."
    - ~ Pair work practice - asking questions about the living room
    - "Is there a .....?"                    **or** "Are there any .....?"
    - "Where is the .....?"                **or** "Where are the .....?"

Homework: Students describe their house or a room in it.



**Lesson Plan II**

**Class:** Monday 7: 30

**Level:** Intermediate Adult

**Goal:** Giving an opinion, plus reasons using "because ....." or "so ....."

**Key Forms/ Focus:** "We should build ..... because ....."

"We need ..... because ....."

"In my opinion ....."

**Book & page:** Spectrum 5, page 28

**Warm-up:** Brainstorm ~ Types of buildings - hospital etc.  
Sentence Jumble ~ build, should, because, we, castle, a,  
tourists, come, will, see, to, it.

**Lesson:**

- Read instructions and look at pages 28 & 29
- "A large vacant lot near your house is to be re-developed, look at the photos of possible uses for the land. What does your neighbourhood need most?"
- Students must state their preference using the given form and give two reasons why they think so.
- Pair work - One student makes a negative statement, "We don't need a ....., because ....."
- Students must come to an agreement.
- Listening activity - "What are Mr. Spector's views?"
- Discussion - What does your city need?
  - What does your city have too much of?

**Extension / Game:** - Name one building to destroy in your city.

**Optional Homework:** - Students write up their opinions of buildings in their city.

Lesson Plan III

Class: Tuesday 8:00

Level: Intermediate Adult

Goal: Practice and use of cooking/kitchen English

Key Forms/ Focus: Base verbs for cooking -chop, slice, add, mix etc.

Book & page: Talk-a-Lot, pages 42 & 43

Warm-up: Brainstorm ~ Cooking verbs  
(Be sure to elicit all the forms on page 42 and as many others as possible.)

Lesson: - after brainstorm compare the students' lists and the book's list.

- Pair work ~ Part 1 Questions 1-4 about cooking.

- Have some students report their partner's answers to the class.

- Pair work ~ Part 2 Students brainstorm food that matches each of the texts cooking verbs.

- Page 42, Part 4 "Mrs. Martin's potato Salad"

Read about ingredients and instructions - check for comprehension

Put the recipe into order - check

Pair work - retell recipe using picture only.

- Page 42, Part 3 work in pairs to list the ingredients for okonomiyaki, bread, lasagna and nikujaga using :

"You need ....."

Extend - create a recipe for one of the above dishes.

- Discuss family recipes and favourite dishes.

Extension / Game: - Brainstorm ~ things (nouns) in the kitchen.

- Discuss ~ Differences between Western and Japanese kitchens.

Optional Homework: Write out a recipe in English.

## **C Instant Games**

Games are an important part of lesson content as they fulfil many roles in the classroom. To the students they help make lessons more enjoyable and tend to be the high points of any class. For the teacher, games are a valuable teaching tool as they provide opportunities for students to practice vocabulary, grammar points and sentence structures and expand their understanding of them more fully. The mere thought of games energises most students, concentrating their attention and motivating them to try harder. The inherent competitiveness of games focuses the students' concentration on the events of the game rather than the specifics of language, which are then acquired or reinforced unconsciously. This approach is central to the organisation of the Finding Out series we use as the basis of our children's courses. However, it is equally applicable to adult classes too. Care of course though has to be taken that the competitive nature of games doesn't disrupt the learning flow of lessons.

For adult classes games are useful as warm-up activities and time fillers as well as providing practice opportunities for students. A wide selection is available in our resources room in Niihama. The following is a brief summary of instant games that teachers can use with little need for preparation.

**Word Search** - Draw a 13 by 3 grid on the white board and write letters in each square, arranging the letters so that they make up a number of words on each line. Ask the students to find as many words as they can. Then they must write down clues for five of the words and take turns reading their clues to the class until all of the words have been found. For extra variation the words could be themed around a topic.

S	E	A	T	R	A	I	N	S	E	C	T	O
C	A	S	T	L	E	A	P	P	L	E	A	F
S	P	A	C	E	N	T	E	R	R	O	A	R

**Word Building** - Write a long word on the white board and give the students a limited time to make as many words as possible using letters from that word.

For example "communicate", might produce the following words: come, nice, unit, comma, mate, commune, meant, mat, meat, eat, cat, team, moat, immune, amount....

This activity can be done as a group, pair work or individual activity.

**Word Set** - First, choose the name of one of the students and draw the following grid outline matching the number of letters in the student's name on the white board. Add any number of subject categories and ask the students to fill in the spaces using words starting with the appropriate letters. This can be done as a group activity, speed work or pair work and should be checked orally by the whole class. (NB. It will not always be possible to complete all boxes in the grid.)

Name :	N	A	O	M	I
Animal :		Antelope		Monkey	Ibex
Country :	Nigeria	America	Oman	Malaysia	India
Food :	Nut		Orange	Mango	
Job :		Artist		Manager	

**Shopping Basket** - The students take turns adding shopping items to an alphabetical list using the following sentence structure: "In my basket I've got a ...." or "Yesterday I went shopping and I bought a .....". As the list becomes longer it becomes more challenging to remember. This activity can extend lessons on countable and non- countable nouns and related counters like some, a packet of, a carton of, a bottle of etc.

**Sound Chain** - This is a word game, which will be very familiar to the students, in Japanese it is known as "Shi-ri-to-ri" and it is played the same way in both English and Japanese. One student chooses a word, the next student must say a word that begins with the same sound as the last syllable of the first word. The game continues with words being linked together in this manner: white, tape, pants, sand, drum, etc.

As in Japanese where words ending in "n" cannot be used, there are no words in English starting with the sound "ing".

**Letter Chain** - This game is played the same way as a sound chain except

that the emphasis is on spelling and new words must start with the last letter of the previous word.

**Word Association** - As the name suggests the teacher starts with a word and the first student has a set time to say the first word that comes to mind. This word then becomes the next word for "association" with each student designating the person to follow them. If the "association" is unclear the student can be asked to clarify it, though the teacher should try to keep the pace of the activity going as quickly as possible.

**What's My Job** - Based on the "20 Questions" format students have a set number of questions, though they may only ask Yes-No questions, to discover a particular job. A quick reference to Departures Unit # 34 will show the style of questions to be asked:

- \* Do you work outside?
- \* Is your job important?
- \* Do you work with your hands?

Once the students think they know the answer they should ask questions to confirm they are correct and the final question should be "Are you a ....."? Which by this point should be the appropriate answer.

**I Spy With My little Eye** - This children's game can be used in conjunction with items in the classroom, posters on the wall, graphics in textbooks, visual materials like "Changing City" and "Changing Countryside" or simply by looking out the window.

"I spy with my little eye something beginning with the letter A?"

**Animal, Mineral, Vegetable** - In this game the students have to ask questions to find a mystery object. It can be a physical object in a container or an imagined one. For the purposes of this game everything is divided into the following categories: Animal - a living thing or an object made from an animal product; Mineral - an object made from metal, plastic, stone or any other inorganic material; Vegetable - an object made from organic materials such as wood or plants. Combinations of these categories are also possible for a pencil is both vegetable = wood and mineral = graphite. A further category of Abstract for non-physical things such as music, ideas or theories could be added for more advanced students, though the emphasis should

always be on a doable task rather than a clever object.

Odd One Out - This is a categories game where the teacher presents a number of items belonging to a similar group and the students must decide which one doesn't really belong there.

For example: apple, orange, banana, peach, strawberry.

\* Strawberry - it is the only one with seeds on the outside.

\* Peach - it is the only one with one seed

\* Banana - it is the only one with a skin that is not edible.

This particular example has more than 20 possible answers.

Chinese Whispers - This is an old children's game in which the teacher takes aside one student and whispers a short sentence to them, after repeating it quietly once or twice the student passes it on to his or her neighbour who in return repeats it to another student. This carries on around the class until the last student says the sentence back to the teacher again. It is interesting to see how much the story changes with all the retelling, especially if the students are given a time limit within which to pass on the message. For larger classes it can be turned into a competition with teams to see which team can finish first.

## **D Sample Children's Lesson Plan**

Class: Monday 3:45 Kids

Level: Finding Out 1

Unit: #4 Pages 15-18

Goal: Introduction of letter ~ H, J, K, & Q

Vocabulary: Hat, Jacket, Key, Queen

Additional Vocabulary: hat, desk, hand, duck, sock, jet

Forms:           How are you?           Fine.  
                  Expressions ~           Okay, Fine, Great  
  Not so good, Terrible, I have a cold.

START:

- Greetings ~ Hello. What's your name?           I'm .....
- How old are you?           I'm .....
- Check homework ~ page 14 - first letters of 8 words
- Review flash cards A-Z   ~ What is it? It's a/an .....
- ~ Pronunciation practice: a - Apple, buh -  
  Book, cuh - Cat
- SLAM game ~ hands on heads, teacher calls out a word and first student to touch the card wins
- Review flash cards for units #1-3
- RAW team game ~ Run and Write first letters of vocabulary cards on white board using units #1-3 cards
- Introduce Unit # 4's new letters H, J, K, Q as vocabulary items - hat, jacket, key, queen
- Word game using new vocabulary (put a flash card face up in front of each student, hit table twice, clap twice call your card and then another student's card at random)
- SLAM game using new vocabulary only
- Introduce writing of each new letter ~ writing in the air then in notebook
- ABC bingo with student caller
- Introduce new supplementary vocabulary ~ hat, desk, hand, duck, sock, jet
- Counting game           ~ Review number 1-31  
  ~ Distribute number tiles randomly - students call and arrange in order

- Repeat all new vocabulary for unit # 4
- SLAM game with new vocabulary
- Introduce new Expressions ~ okay, fine, great, not so good, terrible, I have a cold
- Review colours with flash cards ~ RAT game - Run and Touch - colours around the room
- Tic Tac Toe using vocabulary cards from unit # 4
- Set homework ~ page 15 writing practice letters Kk & Hh
- Tidy up song
- Questions at door as students leave ~ What is your name?  
How old are you?  
What colour is your bag? etc.



## **E Tips from Teachers**

\* Arrive in the classroom early so that you can set up your games. It also helps to switch the air conditioner on early to make the classroom comfortable in summer and winter.

(Keeping lights off in summer will also help reduce the temperature.)

\* Place a cushion in the corner of the room before the lesson starts and use a Yellow Card/ Red Card system to monitor any misbehaviour (boys especially). On their first "foul" the student gets a yellow card and is "sent off" for a repeat offence, this need only be 2 minute "penalty".

Alternatively, positive reinforcement can be employed instead with stamps, stars and stickers used to compliment good efforts and charts showing the success of each student and small rewards when each chart is completed.

\* Each classroom has a communication posters with phrases in English, a Japanese translation and Katakana pronunciation, these can be helpful for overcoming language difficulties and dealing with emergencies ~ "I want to go to the toilet."

\* Begin the class with greetings and then maybe a counting or number game as it is useful revision and requires no classroom preparation. Start working on planned activities when all the students have arrived.

\* Use the posters that are in the classroom and any other decorations on the walls as teaching material, younger children can use them for Run and Touch (RAT) activities while older students can answer questions from them.

\* Use full sentence structures with students and expect similar answers, students get little exposure to English outside the class so they should receive good modelling during lessons and be required to use well structured English too.

\* Look at ways to transfer responsibilities for activities and games to the students. Once activities have been introduced, modelled and successfully practised allow students to take active roles such as calling out vocabulary in Bingo games or asking questions to the class with the help of flash cards.

\* The text builds on acquired skills so it is important that students master each unit and have regular reviews as they will need to use the skills later and will encounter problems if they haven't learned the material well.

\* Children need "get up and move around" games or activities to release energy, incorporate a couple into each lesson such as action verb miming or songs like "Hokey Pokey" and "This is the way we ....."

\* Basic questions should be practised in every lesson:

What's your name?	How old are you?
How are you?	Where do you live?
Do you like .....	What is it?
Is it a .....	What are they?
Are they .....	Do you have a .....
How many do you have?	What's it doing?
Is it .....ing?	

\* Activities like colouring or writing tend to be quiet periods with limited language exchange, look for ways to keep the students talking. Ask them what colour they are using and make suggestions about their work.

\* If children are given work sheets they should always write their name in Roman script on top of the page as extra writing practice and to help identify their work.

\* Homework should be set well before the end of the lesson so that there is no last minute rush and ample time can be given to explaining what they are to do. For weaker students, letters and language forms can be written on the top of their homework page so that they can easily refer to them if they can't remember what to do. Any extra homework should be stapled into the home book so that it is not lost.

\* End classes with a "Tidy up/ Good bye" song and questions at the door, this has the advantage of providing revision, clearly signalling the end of the lesson and emptying the room quickly so that teachers can gather their thoughts and prepare for the next class.

\* After each lesson or at the end of the day quickly review the lessons adding any interesting ideas that may have come to you and deleting or modifying anything that didn't work well and file them according to the units of each text. This will help you develop better lesson plans and greatly reduce lesson preparation time.

## **F Useful Children's Games and Activities**

### **\*Flash Card Games:**

-SLAM - First, review all the cards to check that the students remember all the vocabulary and then lay about ten of them face up on the table. Have the students put their hands on their heads and call out a card, the first student to slam it wins the card. For variation, add touch instructions before each slam: "Touch your head, touch your nose, desk (flash card)." Add distance penalties or time outs to even up the competition and allow everyone to win cards. The student who gets the most cards can be designated "teacher" for the next round.

- Bang bang, clap clap, point point - Each student is given a flash card (letters or vocabulary), it is placed in front of them and one student or the teacher is designated "it". The class slaps the table twice, claps hands twice and points to their right and then left shoulders. The person who is "it" calls their card as they point to their right shoulder and calls any other card as they point to their left shoulder. The person with that card continues the routine, gradually getting faster until someone makes an error and then we start again.

- Grab and Run - The teacher stands in front of the class with the flash cards and shows a card, the first student to call out the answer takes the card and runs around the tables and back to the teacher. This is repeated and allows all the students to participate fairly equally as the answering group is constantly changing. At the end ask, "How many cards do you have?" The students reply, "I have ..... cards."

### **\* Go, Go, Stop!**

First, review the action verb cards and play a SLAM game, then clear the tables out of the way and choose one student to be "it". The "it" child faces the wall on one side of the room while the other students stand against the opposite wall. "It" calls out "Go, Go ...." and the rest of the class skip, hop, jump or dance across the room according to whatever action verb card the teacher is holding. When "it" calls "Stop!" everyone must freeze, and anyone who moves becomes "it". This can be used as an outdoor game when weather allows.

\* What's the time Mr. Wolf?

This well-known game is played in the same way as "Go, Go, Stop!" but allows a lot more flexibility for working with language. In the traditional form the students ask "What's the time Mr. Wolf?" and after Mr. Wolf answers (one o' clock, two o' clock etc.) they each take a step across the room. When Mr. Wolf thinks the "sheep" are close enough, he answers "It's lunch time!" and tries to catch someone before they can reach the safety of the back wall. If "Mr. Wolf" touches a student they become the new wolf. The question format can be changed easily to accommodate many different language targets:

"What is it, Mr. Wolf?"	"It's a ....."
"Where is it, Mr. Wolf?"	"It's (in, on, under) the ....."
"Is it a mouse, Mr. Wolf?"	"Yes, it is. / No it isn't."

The teacher can stand beside the "Wolf" with flash cards to provide answers each time and the final refrain of "Its lunch time" remains the same.

\* Memory Match

This is available as boxed games for working on colours, shapes, animals and adjective opposites, but with photocopying it can be applied to any material used in the texts. First, review all the cards you will be using to check that the students remember the vocabulary, then shuffle and place 6 or 8 pairs of cards face down on the table. The students turn over two cards at a time searching for pairs. As they turn over each card they repeat the target vocabulary:

The class calls:	"What is it?"	Response:	"It's a ....."
	"Are they a pair?"		"Yes, they are."
			"No, they aren't."
At the end:	"How many pairs do you have?"		"I have ... pairs."

No more than 8 pairs should be used at a time or else the activity becomes too long and loses its appeal. One variation on the form is to turn over three cards each turn, this speeds up the process, increases the language practice and makes success more easily attainable.

\* Run and Touch (RAT)

This is a high-energy activity using posters and wall decorations as teaching material. The teacher might work on colours and ask the children to run and touch something red or green. It works well with little children (under five's) but can also be used with older kids once the classroom has been prepared. Some rooms use number and weather cards for decoration and other classes have see through vinyl pockets on the walls in which any card the teacher wishes to practice can be placed. The only downside of this activity is that it tends to be rather hard on teaching materials, so it is best that expendable cards be used.

\* "Go Fish!"

This well known game can be adapted easily to work with the vocabulary cards of Finding Out 1 & 2 which can be photocopied onto cardboard sheets and cut into a playing card size. The game works the same as the card version with students taking turns to ask for the vocabulary cards that they want. The language is basically the same too:

"Do you have a ..... , Rina?"

"Yes, I do. Here you are."

"Thank you".

"No, I don't. Go fishing!"

(Asker takes a card.)

Students must use the language accurately before the next one can take their turn. At the end of the game the students should be asked how many cards they have and answer either "I have three pairs." or "I have six cards." As an extension the students can be asked questions like: "Do you have a T.V. game?" or "Do you have a pet?"

\*Picture - Word Bingo

This vocabulary game is popular with all children's classes and can easily be adapted for use with the Finding Out series flash cards. In the traditional form the teacher calls out the vocabulary and the students cover

each vocabulary picture as it is called. To incorporate more language use the following structures:

"Do you have a ..... ?"      "Yes, I do." or  
"No, I don't."

Don't show the card to the students, if they don't know a word, they should say:

"Show me please."

One way to ensure that everyone is using the language correctly is for the teacher to control the markers used to cover the pictures so that the students must say "Yes, I do" before receiving a marker. Polite structures can be added as well, "Here you are," followed by "Thank you."

Variations on the theme include:

- When the students complete a line they must run around the table before the teacher can countdown from five, then they must call out the vocabulary on their line ..... "It's a cat, it's a house etc." They may often need prompts.
- After the teacher has started the game and called the first few vocabulary cards, the pack can be placed on the table and all the students can take turns picking up the top card on the pile and asking, "Do you have a .....?"
- For more advanced students brainstorm words on a particular theme and write them on the white board. Then distribute blank bingo sheets and have the students choose random words and write them in the squares of their sheet. Some care might be necessary to ensure that the words are actually written down randomly. Once the sheets are completed, the students swap them and the teacher can start calling out words from the board or have the students help transcribe the words onto cards to be shuffled and placed on the table for calling.

## **G Popular Songs for Children**

Songs have a very important role in the classroom as they introduce students to the stress, rhythm, intonation and syllable length of English. As the students learn the songs they gradually assimilate the natural rhythm of the language and often find this the easiest form of English to remember.

### **\* The Alphabet Song**

A	B	C	D	E	F	G
H	I	J	K	LMNOP		
		Q	R	S	T	
U	V	W		X	Y	& Z

Now I know my ABC,  
Won't you come and sing with me?

### **\* Open Shut Them**

Open, shut them,  
Open, shut them,  
Give a little clap, (clap)  
Open, shut them,  
Open, shut them,  
Lay them on your lap.  
Creep them, creep them,  
Creep them, creep them,  
Right up to your chin,  
Open wide your little mouth .....  
But do not let them in.

### **\*In, On, Under**

In, on, under,  
In, on, under,  
Under, on, in,  
Under, on, in,  
In, on, in, under,  
In, on, in, under, .  
Under, on, in,  
Under, on, in.



\* Here We Go Round the Mulberry Bush

Here we go round the mulberry bush,  
The mulberry bush, the mulberry bush,  
Here we go round the mulberry bush,  
On a cold and frosty morning.

\* This Is the Way We Clean Our Teeth

This is the way we clean our teeth,  
Clean our teeth, clean our teeth,  
This is the way we clean our teeth,  
On a cold and frosty morning.

This is the way we wash our hands,  
Wash our hands, wash our hands,  
This is the way we wash our hands,  
On a cold and frosty morning.

Plus other actions ~ sweep the floor, wash the dishes, stir our tea, drink our milk, brush our shoes, comb our hair, eat our food, etc.

\* I caught a fish alive

One, two, three, four, five,  
Once I caught a fish alive,  
Six seven, eight nine ten,  
Then I let it go a gain,  
Why did you let it go?  
Be cause it bit my finger so.  
Which finger did it bite?  
This li'l finger on my right.

\* Old MacDonald had a Farm

Old MacDonald had a farm, ee aye ee aye oh.  
And on that farm he had a cow, ee aye ee aye oh,

Chorus: With a moo moo here, a moo moo there,  
Here a moo, there a moo, everywhere a moo moo  
Old MacDonald had a farm, ee aye ee aye oh.

Old MacDonald had a farm ee aye ee aye oh.  
And on that farm he had a chicken, ee aye ee aye oh,  
With a cluck cluck here, a cluck cluck there,  
Here a cluck, there a cluck, everywhere a cluck cluck,  
A moo moo here, a moo moo there,  
Here a moo, there a moo, everywhere a moo moo  
Old MacDonald had a farm, ee aye ee aye oh.

Plus a duck (quack quack), a sheep (baa baa), a dog (woof woof) a cat  
(miaow miaow), a turkey (gobble gobble) and a pig (oink oink) etc.  
(Refer to animal sound sheet.)

\* The Hokey Pokey

(You) Put your hand in,  
\* (You) Put your hand out,  
(You) Put your hand in and you shake it all about,  
(You) Do the Hokey Pokey and you turn around,  
That's what it's all about.

Then add extra verses using other body parts.

\* The Wheels on The Bus

The wheels on the bus go round and round,  
Round and round, go round and round.  
The wheels on the bus go round and round, all day long.

The hooter on the bus goes peep peep peep,  
Peep peep peep, peep peep peep,  
The hooter on the bus goes peep peep peep, all day long.

The conductor on the bus says, "fares please,  
Fares please, fares please,"  
The conductor on the bus says, "fares please", all day long.

The wipers on the bus swish swosh swish,  
Swish swosh swish, swish swosh swish,  
The wipers on the bus swish swosh swish, all day long.

**H** Class Observation Form

**Teacher :**

**Class :**

**Date :**

Time	Activity	Language Used	Materials	Student Response

**I Trainee Observation Form**

**Teacher :**

**Class :**

**Date :**

<b>Time : Start/Finish</b>	<b>Introduction &amp; Performance :</b>	<b>Student Response :</b>	<b>Alternative Options :</b>

**1) Self Assessment - Classroom Management**

The essence of good classroom management, especially with children's classes, is maintaining control of the teaching environment at all times. This is usually a matter of keeping students engaged and on target with their studies. However, there are certain "high risk" periods in every lesson that are more likely to become unstable, namely the start of the lesson, transitions between activities and the end of the class. These are all periods of change, which can benefit from the use of set routines to help reduce confusion and loss of order.

This form can be used either as check sheet when lesson planning, have all these points been considered during the planning process? Or, it can be used for post lesson assessment, did you employ these techniques in your class?

1) Beginning the class - activities to promote a smooth and efficient start to the class: -Greet students at the door. -Use student helpers for routine tasks. (Putting away materials, setting up activities, cleaning white board etc.) -Write start-up activities on the board. (Better for older students who can read.) -Use routine or ceremonial events to set the tone of the class. (Could be a game or song.)	Yes/No Yes/No Yes/No Yes/No
2) Transitions: -Were routine procedures used? -Were cues or signals used with the students? (Warning them ahead of time to start finishing an activity and be prepared for the next.)	Yes/No Yes/No
3) Smooth closure to classes: -Was sufficient time left for putting books and photocopies in their bags. -Homework assigned earlier in class to avoid last minute confusion. -Routine procedures for finishing class. (Such as a cleaning up or good-bye song or review questions at the door.) -Students cued that end of class was approaching.	Yes/No Yes/No Yes/No Yes/No

## 2) Self Assessment - General Classroom Management Skills

The development of good classroom management skills requires teachers to institute behavioural boundaries, plan effectively, remain aware of everything happening in their classroom and act appropriately to exercise control. The following self-assessment sheet will help identify useful skills and point to areas teachers might like to investigate further.

Ability to:	High	Medium	Low
*Establish and teach rules and procedures			
- Student movement	...	...	...
- Student talk	...	...	...
- Behaviour during downtime	...	...	...
*Ensure smoothness and momentum	...	...	...
*Manage unstable periods			
*Thorough planning	...	...	...
- Cueing and signalling	...	...	...
*Develop student accountability	...	...	...
*Manage inappropriate and disruptive behaviour			
- Being aware of the situation	...	...	...
- Using the desist response (tell the student to stop misbehaving, firmly and clearly)	...	...	...
*Project confidence	...	...	...
*Influence student behaviour			
- Using rewards	...	...	...
- Using punishment	...	...	...
*If there were any problems with student behaviour did you:			
- restate the rule or procedure to the student	Yes	/	No
- have the student identify the rule or procedure	Yes	/	No
- give corrective feedback to the student if they did not understand the rule	Yes	/	No
- impose a consequence	Yes	/	No
- change the activity	Yes	/	No

### 3) Self Assessment - Management Techniques

There are a number of techniques, which aid classroom management and may help forestall the emergence of many problems. Awareness of these techniques or behaviours will greatly enhance the teacher's effectiveness in the classroom. However, as they hard to recall after a lesson this form is probably best used in conjunction with the video recording of a lesson.

1) Did the teacher show awareness of what was happening in the classroom? - Did they identify behavioural problems early and accurately	Yes /	No
2) Did the teacher employ a number of graded responses to resolve problems? For example: - move closer to a problem student - make and hold eye contact with a problem student - rest a hand on the student's shoulder - integrate off task remarks into teaching activities	Yes /	No
3) Did the teacher exhibit smoothness? - Did the various component activities of the lesson fit together well?	Yes /	No
4) Did the teacher exhibit momentum? - Was there pace to the lesson?	Yes /	No
5) Did the teacher exhibit group alerting? - Was the class reminded of the kind of behaviour expected of them?	Yes /	No
6) Did the teacher require accountability from the students?	Yes /	No
7) Did the teacher provide the students with a challenge?	Yes /	No
8) Did the teacher ensure a variety of materials?	Yes /	No

#### **4) Self Assessment\_ - Rules and Procedures**

Many management and discipline problems can be prevented or solved through the teaching and enforcement of appropriate rules and procedures. This form identifies three areas where setting rules can assist teachers and helps evaluate the introduction, operation and effectiveness of such rules. The same format can be used to judge additional rules the teacher may introduce or to analyse the video recorded lessons of other teachers

- 1) What are the rules and procedures regarding student movement?
- 2) How are these rules/ procedures introduced and taught?
- 3) Which ones are easy / difficult for the students to follow? Why?
- 4) How are these rules / procedures maintained and enforced?
- 5) What are the rules and procedures regarding student talking?
- 6) How were these rules and procedures introduced and taught?
- 7) Which ones are easy / difficult for the students to follow? Why?
- 8)How are these rules / procedures maintained and enforced?
- 9) What are the rules and procedures regarding down time ?
- 10) How were these rules and procedures introduced and taught?
- 11) Which ones are easy / difficult for the students to follow? Why?
- 12) How are these rules / procedures maintained and enforced?



## 7) Self Assessment - Questions Skills

This form is to help teachers analyse their use of questions, do they extend students beyond the repetition of basic information and are they supportive in their approach to the students.

Were a wide range of questions asked:

- |   |          |
|---|----------|
| * Knowledge Questions that require students to recall what they have seen, heard, or read.  | Yes / No |
| * Comprehension Questions that require students to organise facts in various ways.  | Yes / No |
| * Application Questions that require students to apply techniques and rules to solve problems that have single correct answers.     | Yes / No |
| * Analysis Questions that require students to explain relationships, make inferences, and find examples to support generalisations. | Yes / No |
| * Synthesis Questions that require students to make predictions, solve problems, or produce original answers.                       | Yes / No |
| * Evaluation Questions that require student give opinions about issues and judge the merit of ideas.                                | Yes / No |

Dealing with problems:

Difficult questions were rephrased and cues given	Yes / No
---	----------

Wait time:

Teacher paused a few seconds before calling on student	Yes / No
Teacher paused a few seconds after calling on student	Yes / No
Teacher did not pause	Yes / No
Not applicable - student answered quickly	Yes / No

Level of difficulty:

Student response was accepted by teacher	Yes / No
Response was not accepted by teacher	Yes / No

Teacher response to student answers:

Teacher gave a brief acknowledgement of correct answer	Yes / No
Teacher gave gushy praise	Yes / No
Student error was "dignified"	Yes / No
Student error was handled inappropriately	Yes / No

## 8) Self- Assessment - Error Correction Strategies

As mentioned before error correction plays a crucial role in this success of lessons and therefore it is important that teachers quickly develop an appreciation of how correction can best be handled. Targeted observation of incorrect student language and teacher responses is a useful method for helping identify language problem areas, selecting appropriate correction strategies, judging their effectiveness and exploring alternative options. The observation of experienced teachers thus offers an effective short cut in acquiring this knowledge.

### Possible Teacher Responses To Errors:

- |  |          |
|--|----------|
| 1) The teacher appeared to consciously ignore error.                         | Yes / No |
| 2) The teacher didn't appear to hear the error.                              | Yes / No |
| 3) The teacher asked the student to repeat.                                  | Yes / No |
| 4) The teacher corrected orally.   | Yes / No |
| 5) The teacher corrected with gestures.                                      | Yes / No |
| 6) The teacher asked the student to correct the error.                       | Yes / No |
| 7) The teacher directed another student to correct the error.                | Yes / No |
| 8) The teacher asked the class to correct the error.                         | Yes / No |
| 9) The teacher used the white board to help the student correct the error.   | Yes / No |
| 10) The teacher pointed out previous examples to assist the student.         | Yes / No |
| 11) The teacher repeated the student's phrase with questioning intonation.   | Yes / No |
| 12) The teacher repeated the student's phrase up to the point of the error.  | Yes / No |
| 13) The teacher mouthed or sounded the first syllable of the correct answer. | Yes / No |

Student Mistake:	Teacher Response:	Result:	Alternatives:
.....	.....	.....	.....
.....	.....	.....	.....
.....	.....	.....	.....

**9) Self Assessment - Discussion Skills**

Most students aspire to having good "free discussion" skills, however for all but advanced classes discussion requires particular care in preparation, control and response to what is a very fluid teaching situation. Awareness of the following considerations will assist teachers in conducting effective discussions.

Level of understanding or skill	High	Medium	Low
<b>Planning tasks:</b>			
considering purposes for discussion	.....	.....	.....
considering student skills prior to discussion	.....	.....	.....
making plans for discussions	.....	.....	.....
use of warm-up or introductory activities	.....	.....	.....
* .....			
<b>Instructional tasks:</b>			
focusing discussions	.....	.....	.....
keeping discussions focused	.....	.....	.....
listening to student ideas	.....	.....	.....
using wait time	.....	.....	.....
responding to students' answers	.....	.....	.....
responding to students' ideas	.....	.....	.....
closing discussions	.....	.....	.....
<b>Responses to help students become more effective in discussions:</b>			
Slowing down the pace	.....	.....	.....
Broadening participation	.....	.....	.....
Increasing personal attention	.....	.....	.....

## 10) Self Assessment - Teacher Enthusiasm

One important element of good classes is the energy level that is created during the lesson, sometimes it is provided by energetic students but usually it is generated through the enthusiasm of the teacher. This form helps identify elements of enthusiasm, which make learning exciting and aid communication with students. They are applicable to all levels of students from small children to adults.

Elements of enthusiasm	Level of effectiveness		
	High	Medium	Low
<b>Vocal delivery:</b>			
- varied, lilting, uplifting intonations, many changes in tone, pitch	.....	.....	.....
<b>Eyes:</b>			
- Shining, frequently opened wide, eyebrows raised, eye contact with total group	.....	.....	.....
<b>Gestures:</b>			
- frequent movements of body, head, arms, hands and face, sweeping motions, clapping hands, head nodding rapidly	.....	.....	.....
<b>Movements:</b>			
- makes large body movements, swings around, changes pace, bends body	.....	.....	.....
<b>Facial expressions:</b>			
- changes denoting surprise, sadness, joy, thoughtfulness, awe, excitement	.....	.....	.....
<b>Word Selection:</b>			
- highly descriptive, many adjectives, great variety	.....	.....	.....
<b>Acceptance of Ideas and Feelings:</b>			
- accepts ideas and feelings quickly with vigour and animation, ready to accept, praise, encourage, or clarify in a none threatening manner, many variations in responding to pupils	.....	.....	.....
<b>Overall energy:</b>			
- high degree of liveliness throughout lesson	.....	.....	.....

## 11) Self Assessment - Teaching Style

This form is to help teachers assess their treatment of students and can show interesting results when the form is filled out twice, once after teaching a lesson and then a second time after viewing a video recording of the same class. Often perceptions of what we think is done in the classroom and what actually happens are quite different. Alternatively, this form can be used as a checklist to raise our awareness of how we should behave in the classroom.

	Seldom	Sometimes	Always
- Do you praise students for good work?	.....	.....	.....
- Do you like the students?	.....	.....	.....
- Are you friendly?	.....	.....	.....
- Do you call on all students equally?	.....	.....	.....
- Do you criticise any students?	.....	.....	.....
- Do you give equal attention to all students?	.....	.....	.....
- Are you fair?	.....	.....	.....
- Do you smile at the students?	.....	.....	.....
- Do you assist all the students needing help?	.....	.....	.....
- Do you pay attention to all the students?	.....	.....	.....
- Do you understand their problems?	.....	.....	.....
- Do you praise their work?	.....	.....	.....
- Do you give them enough responsibility?	.....	.....	.....
- Do you give them enough time to complete their work?	.....	.....	.....
- Do you ask hard questions?	.....	.....	.....
- Do you challenge the students?	.....	.....	.....

## 12) Self Assessment - Presentation Skills

Good presentation skills are essential to the success of any lesson and this form highlights areas of preparation, teaching and lesson review which will aid the development of these skills. It can be used when observing a class or reviewing a videotape of your own lesson.

Level of understanding or skill:	high	medium	low
<b>Preparation tasks:</b>			
-how appropriate was the content	.....	.....	.....
-determine prior knowledge of students	.....	.....	.....
<b>Teaching tasks:</b>			
How well did the teacher			
-explain goals and purposes	.....	.....	.....
-create a context for the materials	.....	.....	.....
-present the learning materials	.....	.....	.....
-speak with clarity	.....	.....	.....
-use explaining links and examples	.....	.....	.....
-display enthusiasm	.....	.....	.....
-extend or strengthen student thinking	.....	.....	.....
-question the students	.....	.....	.....
-conduct discussions	.....	.....	.....
<b>Lesson review:</b>			
-assessing students' understanding	.....	.....	.....
-assessing teacher's performance	.....	.....	.....
<b>Overall Planning:</b>			
What did you like best about the way the lesson was planned and organised?	.....	.....	.....
What could be improved?	.....	.....	.....
<b>Lesson execution:</b>			
What did you like best about the way the lesson was presented (teaching style or delivery)?	.....	.....	.....
What could be improved?	.....	.....	.....

## **K Teacher Observations**

The final week of Stage Two's training is a period of teacher observation in which classes are observed and oral feedback is given. On occasion scheduling may make this difficult to arrange and instead video recording of a lesson might be organised with written feedback given. The following are actual feedback sheets to illustrate some of the elements of teaching that are examined during observation.

"I watched the videos last night and have made the following general comments. Please regard them only as such and decide for yourself what you think is relevant to your own particular teaching style."

### **Mishima Adults - Friday 1:30-3:00**

**\*START** - as the students trickled in you asked them about their Golden Week holidays, providing them with assistance and asking questions as necessary.

\* The classroom had a very good atmosphere, you showed interest in what the students had done and appeared to be building a great rapport with them - **GOOD**

\* Correction - There were a large number of uncorrected errors.

- This is always a problem, whether to correct or not and how often we should correct. Finding the balance is always difficult, especially as we don't want to discourage students with over-correction. My own solution has been to err on the side of fluency and only correct a percentage of the mistakes that I catch. Then occasionally, I will warn the students and have a five-minute blitz where I correct every mistake that I hear.

- However my ultimate aim is to have the students do as much of the correction as possible either through self correction or group correction. When they make errors I simply point out that an error has been made either through gestures, eye contact, repetition, hand signals showing with your fingers where an error occurred or using space lines on the white board. In this way students have the responsibility for correcting their own errors and become more thoughtful in their use of language. If they have difficulty I can give them hints or ask the rest of the group to help them. Generally the group is quite capable of solving most errors and over time the group will take responsibility for most correction, with or without the teacher identifying

that a mistake has occurred.

\* I think Cynthia's (a previous teacher) comments about you talking too slowly can be completely ignored, you spoke very clearly, were well enunciated and could be easily understood. I believe this is an important first step in building communication skills - if the students don't understand what you're saying, how can you teach them? We can work on listening skills later by gradually increasing our speed and adding more difficult vocabulary.

Interestingly though, you spoke more quickly and used more reduced speech with your children's class than your adult class, I wonder why?

\* The discussion went very smoothly with everyone engaged and following the conversation, no one was inattentive and they were very intent as you explained grammar points and vocabulary. No doubt this was helped by your energetic style of teaching - GOOD

\* As the lesson progressed the white board became rather chaotic, you might like to think about a more organised white board layout. One option is to divide the white board into three sections, the left side for grammar points (which remain on the board), the middle as a working area and the right side for vocabulary.

You introduced some interesting vocabulary like: commercialism, obligation and marketing - which the students probably would have benefited from seeing on the white board.

**00:30** ARTICLE - "Did we finish this article?"

There are several ways of approaching doing articles with classes depending on both teacher and student preferences. Some students prefer to go through an article paragraph by paragraph but there are a number of problems associated with this approach -

\* The lesson tends to progress very slowly.

\* Emphasis tends to get placed on vocabulary rather than the intention of the article.

\* The teacher tends to play a dominant role as an "expert" and monopolises talking time.

\* The focus of the lesson tends to be on the text or the teacher rather than the class itself.

All of these were evident to some degree in your lesson.

My own preference is to use the article only as a catalyst for class discussion rather than as a lesson text. The students have the responsibility of taking the article home, reading it and checking any vocabulary that they don't



know. If they have difficulty with any of the vocabulary, phrases or grammar structures these are to be highlighted for later reference during the class. The actual approach to the lesson is quite simple, the article is left face down on the table and each student must talk about some point from the article. Basically this is a paraphrasing exercise, but the key point is that the students themselves select what they want to talk about and the teacher acts simply as a facilitator, directing the discussion with questions or ideas and keeping things flowing smoothly. Once the details of the article have been covered discussion can focus on the intention of the writer, the article's relevance to Japan and the students' impressions of the article. Students can raise questions about the points they have highlighted in the article whenever they wish (as they become relevant to the discussion) or the teacher can leave time near the end of the lesson to answer their queries.

This style of lesson relies on the students taking more responsibility for their learning, needs clear explanation by the teacher and time for the students to work on their discussion skills but results in students who can use their English skills constructively and is definitely worth the investment in time and energy.

Please consider it as an option.

\* Generally, returning to an unfinished article is not advisable, they rarely re-capture the students' interest second time around. It is preferable to have a new fresh article each week.

\* The best source of articles are the Japanese newspapers, the Student Times, Time and Newsweek.

\* Articles should not be bigger than an A4 size sheet otherwise they are too much to expect a student to study. If you find an interesting article that is too big, either cut and paste or cut it into sections and divide them among the students with each student then having to report back to the group about their section. However, be sure that they know what is expected of them in the next lesson!

\* Reading - you asked one of the students to read a passage from the article and she had difficulty pronouncing many words. This would be a difficult task for any student, they have to decipher sounds and meanings at the same time, while under the pressure of presenting in front of everyone. If you would like to work on reading skills it is better for you to read it through first, and then they have a model to work from. They will make less mistakes and correction will be more valid - to correct someone who has

never heard all these words put together before can be a stressful for the students.

\* Clear explanations given for all vocabulary and grammar questions - GOOD  
**TAPE ENDS AT 41 MINUTES**

I would have liked to see more of the actual lesson but the tape clearly showed your good rapport with the students and raised interesting points about teaching discussion classes.

**Mishima Kids** - Friday 5:00 - 6:00

**START:** "How are you? What is your name? How old are you?"

\* The students gradually began to make answers "I'm fine, I'm great"  
The students seemed rather uncertain, it might help to have cues like "happy face" pictures on the desk or wall for them to refer to.

\* All of your questions were teacher to student plus response. Their replies were very unsure. A quick review first with choral practice and picture cues, followed by round robin questions would have been useful.

**00:03** - you asked them for their books and got no response **SO** you immediately switched to a song with actions - "Open, Shut them ...."

\* A good response to something that wasn't working

**00:05** - Letter/sounds: I couldn't see, but done either on the white board or with flash cards. You worked through the vowels and then returned to the table using flash cards.

\* Possibly using the table would have been better, then the students attention hopefully would have been channelled to the centre of the table preventing their attention from wandering so easily, one student was lying on the floor, one leaning on the table and one pulling the table.

CONTROL is always a difficult problem and in this lesson it was always an issue. What to do? This is a new class and therefore needs to learn the ground rules - don't be afraid to be strict with them if necessary ... cushions are for sitting on, no lying on the floor and no running around. Coupled with this they need plenty of action activities to keep them interested and balance their having to remain in one place.

**00:07** - "Touch your head" - body parts, at first this was only an action activity with you giving instructions and the kids touching the appropriate body part, no language content. Then gradually you asked them for more

vocabulary and followed this up by leading into "Head, shoulders, knees and toes" - a good build-up and introduction - GOOD.

New texts given out.

**00:10** Page 1 - "What is this?" - apple, elephant, igloo, umbrella

Page 2 - "Hello, what's your name?" - round robin, student to student questions.

"How old are you?" - round robin, student to student questions.

This was a little confusing, had they practised all this before and now you were just showing them that it was in the book? Their responses were very slow and hesitant so they needed more time and practice. They would have benefited from choral practices of both the questions and answers, as one group, then as two groups before going back into the round robin practice.

\* You had problems with split attention, between you, the book and the video camera, which was largely unavoidable, but you also need to consider control the students and the teaching environment, "Put your books under the table", then you have more chance of commanding their attention.

Page 2 - introduction of octopus and new vocabulary: egg, album, ant.

You then referred to flash cards and back to the book to show the connection between the new vocabulary and a, e, i, o, u.

Page 3 - you introduced/reviewed (?) the "a, e, i, o, u" song and then had them sing along with body contortions, the kids became more interested and really enjoyed it. You then extended the activity by having them answer when you sang "Hello, what's your name?" -GOOD

\* This material was covered very quickly, in seven minutes you taught three pages of the text. As an introduction it appeared too fast and as a review it might have been done more effectively with flash cards.

**00:17** - You handed out a work sheet for writing practice.

\* As this was their first writing practice a more gradual build up might have been more interesting for the students. They could have first mimed writing a letter in the air, then wrote it on another student's back, followed by writing on the white board and finally completing the work sheet.

\* You took the opportunity to extend their vocabulary by translating "dekita" into English and have them use it - gradually they all began using "finished" - GOOD

\* You completed "I & O" and allowed the students to choose their own

stamps - this is especially good for motivation.

\* However, control again became an issue, only two students were actually concentrating, the others were playing about. Part of the reason was that ten minutes is too long to spend on writing two letters and the students' attention spans were exhausted.

**00:27** - Students stand in line and draw letters on each other's backs.

This is probably better as a build-up to a writing activity rather than as a follow on, the "building blocks" idea of gradually increasing difficulty.

**00:34** - Action cards - stand-up, "What is he doing?" - dancing, swimming, etc.

\* The students mimed the actions but there was no language being produced, instead they became more and more hyper. By the time they start jumping on the table you have to give them a collective time-out, a different or slower activity to calm them down. Alternatively, once they learn more language you could have them choose the actions each time or add "statues" to the game with the last person moving dropping out but being able to choose the next action. In this way the activity gradually quiets down without you having to actually control matters.

\* Some of the new text book manuals recommend no more than five minutes on any one activity, no matter how successful it is, so that students do not get over excited. By planning a lesson with 10 or 12 changes of activities the kids are always faced with something new and interesting to do and high and low energy activities can be arranged to balance the lesson. Be careful of students jumping up and down on the table - we have already had one table break in half.

**00:42** - "What is your name?" - Kids still too hyper ..... SO

**00:43** - "What is it?" - Memory Match with animal cards

\* A good response to the situation, the students needed a sit down activity with a central focus to calm them down. Memory Match is best limited to about six or eight pairs depending on the size of the class, so that students can start finding pairs quickly and feel confident in their ability. However, it helps to first run through all of the animals several times to make sure the students are familiar with their English names. Then a couple of SLAM games can be played to check their understanding before going into the Memory Match activity.

**TAPE ENDS AT 48 MINUTES**

Good luck for next week.

**Mishima JHS** - Friday 8:00 - 9:00

**START** - "What did you do in the Golden Week holidays?"

\* The students gave minimal answers even though you had asked them good open-ended questions which gave them lots of opportunity to talk. Unfortunately, this seems an unavoidable feature of JHS classes.

**00:04** - Text (Winner) - "Last week we did page 19."

- "This is a big country ....." - explanation.

- "What is the name of this country? The people are ....."?

- Students read through three passages about different countries with some teacher assistance.

\* The students appeared to be hesitant, possibly they would have benefited from some pre-teaching of the names of countries, capital cities and nationalities and then some choral pronunciation work using the first passage.

\* JHS students are always quiet - we need to look at ways of getting them energised, otherwise their attention never more than two inches away from their books.

- Students gave similar information about Japan - no problem.

- You made up your own model and asked the students to

identify the country.

- Students had to make up their own examples.

\* There were some problems with regions e.g. Australasia - this needed pre-teaching, similarly for nationalities. Has this been covered before, if so a review was necessary?

\* Are these students really J H S? They seemed quite good.

\* Your questions and activities were always done clockwise around the table, you could try to add more randomness as it tends to assure better concentration.

\* This activity and following ones would have benefited from a large world map, were any available or do I need to bring some up from Australia with me?

\* Could this activity have been done as pair work? This would have maximised student speaking time and kept them more occupied, less down time between turns.

- You told them that the next exercise would be very difficult, be careful this can create negative expectations that they won't be able to do it. While it may not be true of this particular class it could affect students in other classes who are not very confident.

- Matching countries, flags and nationalities

- You went over the first example - Turkey and explained "Turkish.

\* This was always going to be a difficult lesson, most students are very poor at geography and there is the added complication that many countries and place names are quite different in English and Japanese, as was shown in the first few examples that you encountered : Turko = Turkey , Wien = Vienna. Lesson planning should take this into account, you didn't anticipate these problems, nor did you appear to have checked your own knowledge all of the capitals and nationalities prior to the lesson.

\* This lesson became very text based and remained limited to the activities outlined in the book. There were a number options which could have extended the material and offered more opportunities to practice the language. You needed to move a way from the text and teach the topic not the page. There also needed to be a considerable amount of pre-teaching before going into the text-based activities.

FIRST you could have elicited the names of regions and THEN brainstormed countries followed by capital cities. NEXT you could have got them to work in a group to match everything together with assistance from you as necessary. Probably working around the white board would have been best. A world map or at least an atlas would have been useful here. THIS could have been followed up by pair work, asking questions about the information on the white board. Nationalities should also have been covered, the best way being to work through the patterns for turning country names into nationalities e.g. -an, -ian, -ish and -stani plus any number of irregular ones that you might want to introduce. Again this could be practised in pairs. FINALLY if resources were available some work on flag recognition could have been done in pairs. THEN the students would have been in a better position to work through the activities in the text.

\* Similarly as I mentioned in the comments about the adult class you need to look at your white board organisation - it again became rather chaotic.

- Listening exercise on country, nationality and language - the students listened and took down the information from the tape

\* It is often a good idea to go over the first listening example as a group activity just to make sure that everyone understands what they should be doing. Though on this occasion as there were only three questions it would have made an already short activity even shorter. Possibly to get the best out of this activity you would have had to make up your own listening section for the students.

**00:34** - Card activity - "Athens is the capital of which country?"

\* As you found before there is a problem with recognition as Athens is "Atenay" and Greece is "Girisha" in Japanese. This can only be overcome by pre-teaching .

\* Energy levels were quite low for this activity - could it have been turned into a team competition?

- These cards were then used for the basis of further activities based on nationalities, they had to ask questions to find out where the various people come from.

\* You went over the first example to give everyone a model of what they should do (GOOD) but overlooked telling them that in information gap activities students must keep their cards secret for the exercise to work best.

\* I was wondering if this activity would be best done as pair work so as to maximise the students' talking time but it probably wouldn't have worked. The question still remains though, how do you get more fluidity into the activity? The students' speech was a rather stilted. And only two students were ever talking at a time, the others remained silent.

**TAPE RAN OUT AT 49 MINUTES**

I always find JHS classes difficult to teach and observing other teachers allows me to see where we can fine-tune our teaching. I have taught this particular lesson theme many times and from experience I have learned to pre-teach everything before going over the text activities.

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