

〈Research Report〉

Developments in English Teaching Methodology

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INTRODUCTION, COURSE DESCRIPTION AND BACKGROUND

The earlier children are exposed to English, the better prepared they will be when they begin formal instruction in the language. It has been said that children are like sponges; that they absorb everything they are exposed to. Children are easily adaptable and can learn new things at a rapid pace. This also enables them to more readily acquire a second language, or even multiple languages.

We are also experiencing a time of globalization, when international trade is performed on a daily basis, and English is most commonly used around the world as the language in which to conduct business.

Because of this, MEXT (The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology-Japan) released the English Education Reform Plan corresponding to Globalization aimed at implementing reform at all levels of education. Incrementally being rolled out in 2014, the plan requires elementary third and fourth-year students to engage in English lessons 1-2 times a week. (Eng Ed Ref Plan)

English Teaching Methodology is a course offered for third and fourth-year students at JIU to learn the fundamentals of children's teaching ideology and provide practical experience teaching children in a classroom setting. The first eight weeks of the course are focused on basic educational theory and preparing students to teach. For the remainder of the semester, students go to a local elementary school every Wednesday to provide English lessons to elementary first and second-year students.

To do this, students must develop their own lesson plans in three groups of three to four students. Each of these teams is assigned a class, or *kumi*, for the semester. They prepare their lessons on Monday, give their lessons on Wednesday, and are subsequently given feedback the following Monday, which they then incorporate into their lesson plans for the next class.

The second semester is similar to the first, with more time spent in the classroom with an emphasis on practicum and less available time for theory.

This course provides our students first-hand knowledge of educational theory, curriculum development, and practical teaching experience. They can then apply the theory with continued education study and use their curriculum and teaching experience in real-world teaching professions. Some students go on to a master's program, others go on to immediate teaching positions.

The purpose of this paper is to present an overview of how the English Teaching Methodology course has developed over the past three years and attempt to answer the following questions:

What needs to form the basis for the curriculum that will be taught to students and the curriculum that they then teach to children in the course?

Going forward, what improvements need to be made to the program in order to better achieve the course objectives?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Research shows that at 6-8 months, American children and Japanese children perform equally well at distinguishing between the sounds la and ra, but when performing the same listening task between the ages of 10 and 12 months, Japanese children show a decline in the ability to differentiate between the two sounds. Further research has shown the same to be true of American children and Taiwanese children in Mandarin; American children in the later age group had more difficulty distinguishing between Mandarin sounds than they did just a few months prior. (Kuhl, 2010)

This shows that it is critical to begin second language acquisition as early as possible. The sooner children begin learning a second language, the sooner they will be able to master the sounds, vocabulary and grammar necessary to succeed at learning the language.

English Teaching Methodology makes use of two of Krashen's fundamental hypotheses: The Input Hypothesis (Comprehensible Input) and the Affective Filter Hypothesis.

Comprehensible Input

Each class teaches basic vocabulary to students in progression utilizing Krashen's Input Hypothesis theory. In this theory, he states that input must be comprehensible in order for a student to learn. As when learning math, a student cannot move from basic addition and subtraction directly to algebraic equations.

In English Teaching Methodology, this N+1 Theory is also followed, that is, language concepts need to be based on previous language lessons. When teaching vegetables for example, student-teachers are encouraged to review using fruit as a linked compare and contrast activity, or colors or shapes to encourage Bloom's Taxonomy and *higher-order-thinking-skills*. (Bloom, 1956)

Bloom writes that in order to proceed to the next step in learning, first a student must master the lower order thinking skills, which are remember, understand, and apply. If a student does not remember the target vocabulary or grammar necessary to communicate, then they will be unable to understand, much

less apply the language. Building from these basic skills, a student can then analyze, evaluate, and create, the three core categories of Higher Order Thinking Skills (HOTS.)

Understanding this as instructors, we may then proceed to utilize this in our lessons. Days of the week are taught before months and holidays, pets are taught before farm animals, which are then taught before zoo animals, and numbers are taught before telling time in English. By building context and increasing their exposure to the language in a logical progression, the children can master the lower order thinking skills from which to expand upon.

For example, when teaching numbers, students can use addition and subtraction to illustrate that the language and concepts are not static and create links between L1 and L2 languages in context in other subjects. Once the children make the connection between the language they have learned and the subject that they have experienced before, they can produce the same results in their L2 language. If a child can be taught in English that $1+2=3$, but produce different combinations without instructor help, such as $3+4=7$, they will demonstrate that they have clearly mastered the concept in both languages as well as have acquired the L2 language ability to relay the information.

Student-teachers are encouraged to elicit complete sentences from their students (more than the basic and rote, simple repetition of vocabulary) and maximize child language production whenever possible. It is not enough for the child to simply say “I like dogs.” Preferred responses would be: “I like dogs. Dogs are fun.” Or “I like dogs, but I don’t like cats.”

The Affective Filter Hypothesis

Another main goal of the course is to establish an atmosphere conducive to learning English that children will carry with them for the rest of their lives. By learning English through the use of fun and engaging activities, the objective is to break down any affective filters they may have or to avoid developing them in the first place. Too many times older students develop an aversion to learning English because their only exposure to the language has been in boring read-and-repeat, grammar-based (as opposed to context-based) courses. While these types of courses have their place, students often develop their affective filters during these courses and grow to dislike the subject without having had exposure to content-based or engaging, dynamic lessons.

David Paul writes in his 2003 book, *Teaching English to Children in Asia*:

Most children see life in terms of games and almost anything else, except perhaps eating, sleeping, or watching TV, is regarded as something they “have to” do rather than “want to” do. As teachers, we need to recognize and go along with this basic fact, and give games a central role in our classes.

If learning itself feels like a game, it is much more likely the children will take what they learn home with them and use it in their daily lives.

He goes on to note that games should not be played for their own sake and should be used in a constructed and meaningful way in order to use the content for learning.

Students are encouraged while developing their lesson plans to incorporate a wide variety of games and activities to maximize the use of the language while keeping the material fun and engaging. This is where Gardner's Theory of Multiple Intelligences (1983) is used to balance the activities in the lesson.

In his theory, Gardner hypothesizes that there are eight intelligences that affect how a person may learn. They are the musical-rhythmic, visual-spatial, verbal-linguistic, logical-mathematical, bodily-kinesthetic, interpersonal, intrapersonal, and naturalistic intelligences. One student who is skilled at sports may benefit from an active, student-centered activity that has them moving about the classroom, but another student who is more apt in the verbal-linguistic intelligence may learn better during the listen and repeat phase of presentation of language and vocabulary.

By using songs in a lesson, children are not only using and developing the musical-rhythmic intelligence; by singing they are also using the verbal-linguistic intelligence. This is further strengthened by listening to not only their own voices, but those of the instructor and their peers, touching on the interpersonal intelligence.

A song such as "Head, Shoulders, Knees and Toes" incorporates physical movement, benefitting the bodily-kinesthetic learners, and being aware of and observing the people around you brings in the visual-spatial intelligence.

If the students are able to incorporate games and activities that make use of multiple intelligences, or learning styles, then the children should be able to learn that much more effectively.

CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT

When the instructor inherited the course from previous professors, there was no clear goal or theoretical structure from which to follow. Organizing the materials was of paramount importance, to understand what was available to be taught to the children, as well as develop a progression of what to teach and when to teach it.

The initial course was designed to teach first through fourth year students, sometimes two lessons a day. The available flashcards were organized, a list compiled, and students and the instructor determined the following progression system:

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| <u>1st year:</u> Numbers 1-10 (11-20) ABCs Classroom objects Colors Fruits Pets Shapes | <u>2nd year:</u> Weather/seasons Days of the week Emotions Family Sports Vegetables Farm animals |
| <u>3rd year:</u> Months/holidays Food Zoo animals Body parts Actions Nationalities/countries Telling time | <u>4th year:</u> Sweets Jobs/buildings Clothes Insects Marine animals Vehicles/transportation Drinks |

Halloween or Christmas lessons are optional and are given in the last lesson of October or December, respectively.

In 2018, classes were decreased to first and second year only to provide more language instruction for students in preparation for third and fourth-year academic study. The second-year lessons of weather/seasons, days of the week, emotions and family were taught in the second semester for first year students. All of the third-year content was absorbed into the curriculum for second year students. Any fourth-year content remained optional in the event all material from the first 21 lessons had been fully covered.

Finally, it became clear that the most effective way to direct students for activities and games would be to teach all first-year students commands for the very first lesson. As such, they were incorporated into the curriculum starting in spring of this year (2019.) In this lesson, basic commands such as sit down, stand up, raise your hand, form one line/two lines/three lines and form one circle/two circles are taught using Total Physical Response (TPR) and repetition to prepare students for basic commands necessary to perform the desired tasks in class. It also provides all three groups of teachers with one consistent lesson with which to compare teaching techniques and activities.

2019 IMPROVEMENTS AND ADDITIONS

Many times over the last two years of the course, students have encountered classes who have had difficulty in following basic instructions such as forming a line, or instructions on how to play a game. In order to more effectively direct the children, the following criteria must be met:

1. Have the students performed this activity before?
2. Are the instructions comprehensible?
3. Did teachers sufficiently demonstrate how to perform the activity?

The answer to the first question can easily determine how well an activity will do in class. If the children have performed the task in previous weeks, or in the case of second year students, the previous year, they will most likely know what to do and will perform better than a class that has not done the same activity.

The answers to these questions play off each other. If the students are familiar with the activity, then the instructions may differ slightly from previous lessons insofar as they remain close enough to the instructions the students are familiar with. If the students are less familiar with the activity, then instructions need to be as simple and clear as possible so that students can familiarize themselves with the language necessary to perform the task. If teachers effectively demonstrate how an activity should be done, then students should be able to perform said activity regardless of whether they understand the directions or whether they have performed the activity in the past.

Starting this year, it was decided it would be most beneficial to devote the first class for first-year students entirely to commands. The sooner children are exposed to commands, the sooner they will be able to make connections to their L1 language and be able to enact the commands in both their native language or L2 language.

This commands lesson lends itself perfectly to the use of James Asher's Total Physical Response (TPR). TPR stimulates language learning in students who learn best by doing (Gardner-Multiple Intelligences). Through repetitive action (pattern practice), students learn basic commands in English that they are already familiar with in their own language (Krashen-Comprehensible Input). As students sit down and stand up, they make the connection with 起立 (*kiritsu*, or stand up) and 着席 (*chakuseki*, or sit down). Commands then progress to make a line (two lines, three lines), make a circle (two circles), go to (flashcard x) and so on. By the end of the lesson, students should have acquired all the knowledge they need to be able to function in any English classroom setting. If not, peer observation, review in the following class, and repetitive action throughout the school year will cement the commands in children's brains.

THE RESULTS OF THIS PROGRAM

To determine how best to proceed with the English Teaching Methodology course, it is important to analyze what the strengths of the course are and to determine areas for improvement. To do this we will perform a S.W.O.T analysis of the course. S.W.O.T. stands for Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats.

Strengths:

Each teaching team consists of at least one international student and two Japanese students. This is one of the program's greatest strengths. Ideally, the international student is a native speaker of English or has native-level ability. The Japanese students in the *jido-eigo* or *kyoshoku-kate* programs are able to apply the theory they learn in that program to this course. Most are returnees who have studied abroad and improved their English ability greatly between their sophomore and junior years. These students work together as a team and foster not only communication in English but also in Japanese during preparation time. They also provide a balance for each other as one student may be more proficient than another in the language, one may have more teaching experience or theoretical knowledge, and the international student may have a varying degree of both and often helps with correct pronunciation in the classroom.

Another strength is the materials. While there is a constant need to provide for additional flashcards (or missing cards; rarely a second complete set) all the flashcards have been organized and catalogued in order to provide students with easy to find and easy to use materials. As lessons continue, students often develop their own handouts for activities which are then kept for future use.

One additional strength would be the 360-degree feedback implemented throughout the course. Evaluation prior to 2017 is unknown, but may have been limited to classroom observations and feedback.

In 2017, in addition to those methods of evaluation, self-evaluation sheets were introduced. They include the following criteria:

- Write three good points about the lesson and why they went well:
- Write three things that you would change about the lesson and why you would change them:
- Did you maintain the teaching cycle at all times, presenting the language effectively, practicing through activities, and reviewing after the activity?
- Was the lesson pace too fast, too slow, or just right? What parts were off pace and how did you adjust to that in the lesson?
- How was your classroom management during the lesson? Were all students actively participating?
- Were any students misbehaving or uninterested in the lesson? If so, how do you intend to involve

those types of students more in the next lesson?

- Did you put enough effort into the preparation of the lesson? Did you have a backup activity in case the lesson went faster than expected?
- If one (or more) of your peers did a very good job during the lesson, who were they and why were they exceptional?
- If one (or more) of your peers did not do a very good job during the lesson, who were they and why do you feel they were underperforming?
- Finally, what grade would you give your performance and why?

These questionnaires are distributed after each lesson and should be completed before the professor begins the lesson recap and feedback on Monday morning. They provide students the opportunity to analyze their own strengths and weaknesses, praise hardworking peers and note underperforming peers if necessary.

Having worked at an *eikaiwa*, or English conversation school, the professor also decided to ask the elementary school teachers for feedback and incorporate it into final decisions concerning scores. The questions distributed periodically are as follows:

- _____年 _____組
- 今回の授業は. . . [下から選んで下さい]
とても悪かった やや悪かった 普通 やや良かった
とても良かった
- 今回の授業といつもの授業はいかがでしたか。
いつもより下手でした ほとんど同じ いつもより上手でした
- 今回の授業の良い点を書いて下さい。
- 今回の授業の悪かった点を書いて下さい。
- 今回の授業のペースはいかがでしたか。
- 子供達のマネジメントはいかがでしたか。問題ありましたか。
- 他の希望や意見を書いて下さい。
- 今回の授業に満足でしたか。
とても不満 不満 普通 満足 大満足

These translate into:

- _____year _____class
- Today's lesson was (please choose from the following) Very bad, bad, OK, good, very good
- How was today's lesson compared to usual lessons? Worse than usual, the same as usual, better than usual

- Please write the good points of the lesson.
- Please write the bad points of the lesson.
- How was the pacing of the lesson?
- How was the management of the children? Where there any problems?
- Please write any other wishes or opinions.
- Were you satisfied with today's lesson? Very unsatisfied, unsatisfied, neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, satisfied, very satisfied

As the elementary school is also a customer, not only does this survey provide the program with the opportunity to gain additional insight into the lesson's components, it allows for an ordinal scale with which to rate lessons. This information can then be relayed to students to make adjustments to their lessons. It also lets teachers know that their voices are expressed and provides an opportunity to present any concerns they may have.

Last, this course also benefits the community. Not only are we providing a service to a local elementary school, it shows young Japanese learners that native English speakers and advanced Japanese speakers of English can work together and communicate to teach them a foreign language. The children get increased exposure to the language and learn vocabulary and structure without grammar being drilled at them.

Weaknesses:

Students are strongly encouraged to achieve a 500 score on the TOEIC test or higher. Some students do not take the test, or have not yet achieved this score at the beginning of the course.

This is based off the average Japanese junior high school teachers' TOEIC score of 560, and high school teachers' score of 620 (TOEIC-town.net, 2011). By using the difference of 60 points between the two, one can deduce that an elementary school teacher should have a minimum score of 500 on the TOEIC to teach English at the elementary school level.

Another weakness is whether students are able to take the entire course. Sometimes the international students are exchange students who are only at JIU for a semester; other times students leave in the fall to study abroad, or yet more students come back from abroad and begin the course in the fall with English Teaching Methodology II. In the first two cases, the 15-week experience is lost from the program through no fault of the students; in the third case there simply is not enough time to teach them all of the theory presented in the first semester. It is left mostly on the students to provide the theoretical concepts necessary to succeed in the lesson in that event. Students in the third case also cannot experience the practice lessons given to prepare for classroom teaching.

A third weakness, and the largest complaint from students, is that the practice lessons are nothing

like the lessons given at the elementary school.

Between the theoretical component and teaching at the elementary school, students are required to write a lesson plan and teach that lesson to the class. Alterations are then made, and a mock lesson is given to first-year Fundamentals of English students. While this provides much-needed in-class teaching experience, university students are vastly different from elementary school students. The audience is much more mature, and even though it is explained to them that the lesson is for children and to help their fellow students practice teaching, they often are not as enthusiastic. The games and activities are designed with the children in mind, not university students.

In addition to that complication, many of the students do the same extra-curricular activities or are even in the same class. As a result, the atmosphere in the mock-lesson is sometimes less than ideal.

Finally, students seem to be underprepared to write a formal lesson plan. The Midterm Lesson Plan and Final Lesson Plan are major components in the final evaluation, but there are often vast differences between the functional lesson plan for each week developed in groups, and a detailed lesson plan that must be of quality such that any instructor of the language is able to effectively teach from that lesson plan. More time must be taken in the future to make corrections and guide students to write quality lesson plans.

Opportunities:

As stated earlier, students are encouraged to provide linkages between language concepts in order for the children to develop and utilize Higher-Order-Thinking-Skills. The more the students will be able to learn from context-based learning, the easier time they will have as they move on to formal instruction.

Teaching children is a rewarding experience. Hopefully more students will enjoy teaching children in this course and go on to become teachers themselves.

Finally, as mentioned earlier with the Affective Filter Hypothesis, if the children become more interested in acquiring English as a language, then they can go on to have international careers. Some may even pursue teaching endeavors.

Threats:

The first threat to the course is low enrollment. The 2018 course had nine students in the second semester. Three students per *kumi* is the desired minimum; while it is certainly possible for one or two of our student-teachers to instruct a class, it is desirable to have three or four to offer more time for individual and small group instruction.

The second threat is low international student enrollment. During the Fall 2018 semester, one group consisted only of Japanese students for the first week. This was questioned by the teacher of the class. The next week teams were shuffled in order to have an international student in every class. If fewer

international students enroll in the course, it will become difficult to maintain this balance.

One additional threat that has not been an issue to date is the onus on individual responsibility. Students are designated to take the folders home and bring them to the elementary school Wednesday morning. If those students are unable to attend due to illness, the rest of the group will not have the materials necessary to carry out their lesson. This extends to the professor of the course, who brings the toys and other tools necessary for the language activities performed in class.

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| S.W.O.T Analysis for English Teaching Methodology, 9/2019 | |
| <i>Strengths:</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diverse teams of Japanese and international students • Materials organized, catalogued and periodically updated • 360-degree feedback from professor, student, peers, elementary school teachers • Benefits the Togane community |
| <i>Weaknesses:</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students might not meet TOEIC requirement • Students may only take one semester of the course • Only classroom experience is with a different age group than they teach • Students are not fully equipped to produce formal lesson plans. |
| <i>Opportunities:</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can have children engage in language even more, teaching in context and using HOTS • Rewarding experience may induce more students to seek a career in education • Reduction or elimination of affective filters may lead to children pursuing international careers or teaching careers |
| <i>Threats:</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Japanese student enrollment fluctuates • International student enrollment is not guaranteed, limiting number of native or native-level speakers • Illness or transportation may lead to lack of teaching materiel or teachers |

FUTURE ENDEAVORS

In order to improve the curriculum moving forward, there are two main things the instructor would like to introduce in order to provide more modern educational theory and practice, as well as pave the way for the future of technology in the classroom. They are the introduction of elements of CEFR-J “can do” statements and the use of interactive educational software.

Recently, the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) has been used as one of the leading standards in developing a curriculum that shows student progress. Its use of “can do” statements sets an actionable goal for each lesson or unit that the student will be able to achieve and realize they have achieved, therefore gaining confidence using the language.

This has in turn produced the CEFR-J concept for Japan, using vocabulary and goals that are similar, but more in line with Japanese cultural concepts and commonly used vocabulary. The word “temple,” for example, is less used in Europe and is therefore a higher rated term, but is very commonly used in Japan and is rated in the lower A1-A2 range.

While this can prove most effective in motivating students who are aware of their language ability and learning, it would be difficult to do the same in a children’s lesson. How then could this be accomplished?

One idea would be to prepare a bilingual list of can-do statements, not for the children, but for the elementary teachers and parents. If the teachers and parents are provided with a list of everything the children have studied, and what the students can do, such as “Students can identify the English words for fruit and associate them with their respective colors in English,” then the teachers or parents can help their children review at any time and continue fostering their English education.

The next concept the instructor would like to incorporate into the program is the use of technology in the classroom, particularly interactive DVDs or video games. For years, teachers have incorporated videos and CDs into their lessons. The benefit of CDs is obvious; listening is one of the four core skills required to learn a concept and be able to apply it in further analysis (HOTS). It is the main form of input humans experience on a daily basis and how babies are first able to learn how to speak. Listening activities help audio-visual learners learn the language. Videos provide the same benefits as listening and have the added benefit of visuals which help to provide context (content-based learning.)

While both of these technologies are important and necessary tools for a teacher to have in their arsenal, little interaction can be had apart from answering questions and taking notes.

It is believed that software programs can also be incorporated into language learning in order to increase interactivity with the language and promote learning either in class or utilized at home for continued practice and language support. Let us briefly examine one such language game and how it could be effective in learning a second language:

This piece of software is Kinect Sesame Street TV (Xbox 360, 2012, Microsoft Game Studios). It features activities such as pointing, jumping and gesturing alongside on-screen movements to interact with the game on the television. The built-in camera of the Xbox Kinect puts the image of the child (or children) on the TV, so they can feel as if they are a part of the Sesame Street world.

The primary concern with the software would be whether it meets the requirements for comprehensible input. As the game is designed for native speakers of English, are the instructions simple enough to be understood by EFL students? If that is not the case, does the game demonstrate well enough through actions and use of visuals for those students to understand? Finally, if not, how much additional instruction would teachers or parents have to give in order for students to be able to effectively use the software to the point where it is a benefit to them? It is these questions that the professor will attempt to answer in a future project.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Many of the concepts outlined in this essay and the theoretical component of the English Teaching Methodology course may be basic educational ideas, but the course is designed to be an introductory course to English-teaching theory in the weeks prior to becoming a practical experience teaching at elementary school. Without these core ideological concepts, students would not understand the background and the purpose behind the activities done in class. This strong foundation in theory forms the basis for the curriculum and provides an introduction for those students interested in learning more to continue their studies in the Education field.

Further, students learn through this theory that this class is not just “playing games with children,” rather, it is a gateway to the children’s future of language learning. By instilling the idea that learning English is a positive experience, the main hope is that children will want to continue to learn the language and avoid many of the pitfalls that EFL learners experience in their formative years.

Going forward, using the S.W.O.T. analysis, it is believed that more time must be spent on writing quality lesson plans that are detailed, organized well, and feature all the components of a good lesson. This is important, not only because it is a major component of their class evaluation, but because it will enable students to think about their weekly group lesson plans in more detail.

In conclusion, the English Teaching Methodology course has developed into a program with clearly defined objectives and offers a clear curriculum for the children to study, while at the same time giving students the freedom to develop their own lesson plans. The theory presented, while basic and lacking in time for full development, covers core educational concepts and can be expanded upon in the future. This course provides students with the skills and knowledge of how to teach children, and feedback from the students has been positive.

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