

Changing the Expectations Surrounding English Education in the Classroom

英語教育の現場改革

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要旨

日本において英語力が基準点以下の生徒に外国語としての英語を教える場合、教師は改革が難しい既存のシステムを越えて、状況に合わせた独自の改革を行う必要がある。EFLの教室では、構成主義のアプローチを行う事も有意義であると考えられる。このため教師は、カオス理論や計算量理論、体験学習等の新しい教育方法について知ることが望ましい。これらの教育方法は、これまでの日本の英語教育システムでは採用されておらず、今後も採用は難しいと考えられるが、基準点以下の生徒に対しては大きな成果が見られる。

Abstract

The concept of the teacher as a leader is examined. In particular the possibility for the EFL teacher to bring positive change to a typical Japanese college EFL (English as a Foreign Language) classroom populated with underachievers is investigated. An argument is made for change based on the introduction of more student friendly teaching methods. Literature related to the field is reviewed in an effort to explore possible avenues of development the EFL teacher in Japan might successfully follow in trying to realize positive change in the classroom.

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Introduction

This paper addresses the failure of English education in Japan and asks how, as a leader, the EFL classroom teacher can help bring about change and improvement. The population of most interest is extreme underachievers in the first year of college. Previous research is referred to determine the potential benefits of constructivist approaches to learning, investigation and manipulation of affective learning factors, and the use of diagnostic applications of assessment. These are investigated as possible ways to correct real problems and shortcomings that are an intrinsic part of the Japanese EFL college classroom. In attempting to realize improvement, the role of the teacher as a leader is emphasized.

In the Framework section of the paper significant consideration is given to the problematic role of specific Japanese traditions. It is important to understand how history and culture relate to problems EFL teachers and students face daily in the Japanese classroom.

It is expected that through sound methodology and meaningful assessment the teacher can help students learn and succeed in the classroom, and that a sound understanding and application of leadership skills will greatly aid the teacher in attempting to realize this goal.

Framework

Roots of problems in the EFL classroom today

The attack on Japan's education system is reaching huge proportions as the accountability of public education enters a new phase (K.Wong, 2003). For a long time the almost total failure of the EFL classroom has been one of the obvious targets of criticism and dissatisfaction. Examining the problems with popular "English only" methods in Japan, R. Weschler (1997) notes, "Quite clearly, Japanese college freshmen, after having studied English for six years in junior and senior high school, *simply could not speak English*" (p.88).

Inevitably, in the literature the ongoing and heated discussion of what is right, what is wrong and what to do focuses on many different classroom issues. But in fact each specific classroom problem is just one vestige of a much bigger problem. Problems such as Japan's decades long recession (one of the deepest and longest in modern history), the failing of its social health systems, massive government deficit spending, and disarray in banking and finance industry have a bearing on college classrooms. It is useful to understand how these societal problems and certain problems in education are related.

Japan at the crossroads.

On almost every front imaginable Japan now stands at a crossroads and the present is fraught with uncertainty. At the heart of the dilemma lies the fact that the traditional systems of Confucianism, feudalism and cast/class are beginning to break down. The old is quickly passing and something new is trying to emerge to take its place. These are uncertain, turbulent, difficult and painful times. Yet, it could be said that what we are seeing is not the end of an old way of life, but the regeneration of a system that no longer fits with the reality of peoples' daily lives.

Because of the direct bearing that these changes have on students and teachers, it is important that we understand them well before turning our attention to the immediate question that this paper seeks to address, which is, as leaders, how can college EFL classroom teachers help bring an end to the long history of failure in the Japanese EFL college classroom?

The role of Confucianism, feudalism, social class and xenophobic isolationism has had a dramatic effect on all aspects of Japan; her people, culture and institutions. These have been powerful forces that have allowed a few to manipulate and control the many. When, in the 70's, Japan suddenly and unexpectedly burst forth as one of the world's most innovative and dynamic economic powers, the role of these forces in forming a stable, peaceful, harmonious society was cast in a highly favorable light. But the fact is, and always has been, that there is a dark and unnatural side to this way of thinking, exploitive use of power, and social constraint. All too often people only see what they want to see, and that is why you never hear anyone praising Confucianism, feudalism, social class and xenophobic isolationism for the roles they played in Japan's violent, nationalistic, expansionistic past. However, when these same traditions were said to be responsible for a boom in commercialism and consumerism, which today is everyone's darling, they became interpreted as very good and desirable indeed.

In regard to the problems raised, and solutions sought in this paper, it is important to note that these traditions have been a sort of double-edged sword at best. Over time they have served the interests of the politicians, industrialists and military well. They have always produced the two things people in power needed; a very small, capable elite and masses of well indoctrinated drones. However, nothing is forever, and at last even the forces behind the juggernaut of traditional Japanese culture are starting to crack and fall apart. The old rules don't apply, and cannot provide what is needed now; creativity over conformity, meaningful interactions and relationships as opposed to the forced singing of company slogans and

dogma, and a highly independent and intelligent population as opposed to an entrapped yet highly literate one.

The call for true learning in the EFL classroom, a call that can be better answered by the use of good, modern leadership techniques and philosophy, is timely. It is a call for the end of the old and the beginning of the new. It will be a fight to open new doors and walk new paths leading out of the darkness of long traditions of patriarchy, nationalism, hierarchy, bureaucracy, centralization, and extreme, unquestioning conformity. To achieve real learning in just one classroom will only be a small achievement. It will, however, be one more step taken in the right direction.

Harmony, but at what cost?

With the exception of his discussion of the heavy handedness of Toyota and the works of Satoshi Kamata, most of the examples G.Morgan (1997) gives of Japanese society and business are much more a representation of the myth than the reality. Of course it is often useful to mix myth with reality and vice versa, however the seriously interested reader should be advised to consult the original works of Murray Sale or Satoshi Kamata to get a better understanding of the darker side of the social reality that exists in Japan and has come to be glorified with glowing terms of ‘harmony’, ‘efficiency’, and ‘honor’.

In the end, Morgan is basically correct when he says that the traditional form of Japanese culture was “hierarchical yet harmonious” (p.124), but it is a harmony that has carried with it the heavy burden of absolute, ridged conformity. In the Edo era (late 1700’s to 1880’s), for example, the Shogunate decreed that the penalty for leaving the country or talking to a foreigner was death. This would apply to intentional as well as accidental meetings (fishermen lost at sea, or any Japanese who had the great misfortune to encounter shipwrecked sailors, etc.). In a Japanese classroom the teacher is the vestige of power. Is it any wonder that none of the students want to speak up and risk being out of line?

The ‘harmony’ that we see in Japanese culture is the kind of harmony one sees when the culture itself not only mandates and glorifies ‘knowing ones place’ and the unquestioning acceptance of the superiority of others, but also combines this understanding with the reality that failure to conform totally to the system will lead to the most extreme ostracism and punishment. The message is clear. Don’t be the nail that is sticking up unless you want to be the one to get pounded down. Harmony (as in don’t rock the boat) is usually a better alternative. In the classroom this is great for discipline. But let there be no question; the sound of forty students sitting stone-cold in their seats and waiting for the teacher finish, step down from the podium and leave the room is certainly not the sound of learning, achievement

and growth. It is the sound of a bogus harmony that is shortsighted and robs us all of our right to deeper, fuller, enlightening and rewarding experiences. In the EFL classroom the good news is that it is time for a new, better harmony.

Traditions of the Japanese classroom

When it comes to education, Japan's history and the resulting culture has given rise to schools that are highly centralized, extremely bureaucratic institutions where behavior is formalized and ritualized. For teachers and staff they are places where, if you carefully follow all the rules, one fits in (as opposed to makes friends). All interactions are determined by one's position in the hierarchy; subordinate, equal, or superior. A subordinate should act with humility, equals with cool and respectful mutual acknowledgement, and superiors with calm detachment. In keeping with the Japanese saying 'Talk is silver, Silence is gold', conversation is ideally kept to a minimum. Individuals who talk a lot at work, in public or social settings are seen as odd, undesirable, and untrustworthy. Work is not a place where fulfilling relationships should occur. In fact, it is expected that one's personal life will have no bearing on, and no connection to one's workplace and work environment.

Classrooms in Japan are often large (forty students per class is the standard for elementary through high school) and the teacher very tightly maintains class discipline. Traditionally, discipline has not been hard to enforce because of the unquestioning acceptance of teachers as superior and students as subordinate. This sense of superiority and subordination is tied to the Japanese concept of seniority and knowledge. In keeping with Confucian concepts the young must honor and respect the old. In fact the two Chinese characters used to represent the word teacher are 'previous' and 'born'. In Japan a teacher is someone who was born before you and is therefore that much more knowledgeable and worthy of respect. The role of the student is to respect and honor the teacher who, in return, will dispense his knowledge to the students who are expected maintain a proper and diligent attitude. Unfortunately, in a Japanese classroom information flows only one-way. Teachers lecture, students listen. What the students think or feel is not very important.

Extreme competition is another long-standing tradition of Japanese education. It is not very likely that you will hear students say, "Let's study together for the test", or "What did you write for number five?" That is because from the very first day of junior high all students begin the lifetime process of being ranked and separated. In Japan any student can go to high school, but not any high school. Junior high rankings determine high school entrance options. High school rankings determine college entrance options. College determines employment options, which influence marriage options, and so on down the line. It could be argued that a

Japanese person's entire life is decided within the first half year in the seventh grade. Cooperative learning has had no place in the traditional Japanese secondary classroom.

If it's broke, let's fix it.

What does this entire mean when one tries to look into the shortcomings of English education in Japan? That is a little difficult to say because there are so many different aspects and layers of English education. The predominate period is clearly the three years of mandatory English instruction carried out in junior high school. This is followed by the three years of English instruction most students would go on to receive in high school. (In Japan mandatory education ends after the ninth grade.) For most Japanese students their first encounters with English start long before they reach the seventh grade and continue long after they leave high school.

It is very likely that no other nation places as much emphasis and commits as many resources to teaching English as a Foreign Language as Japan. What is interesting, however, is that in spite of this, Japanese English learners, taken as a whole, are notoriously unaccomplished when it comes to learning English. The obvious testimony to the shortcoming of English education in Japan would be the fact that upon close examination so many show that Japanese students (and adults) possess almost no meaningful levels of English language skill. Sadly, even after years of study and exposure to the language, there seems to have been an extreme shortage of meaningful encounters with English as a living language.

Most interesting, however, are the feelings that this very long tradition of failed English education has had on the Japanese mindset. The three most common things a Japanese underachiever is likely to say about English as a foreign language are 1) English is too difficult to understand, 2) I can't speak/understand/use English, and strangely, even after all they have been through, 3) I would like to speak/understand/use English. The fact that these statements are being made by people who are members of one of the most highly literate, well educated and (since the 70's) most widely traveled societies in the world only makes the irony all that much more poignant.

The question becomes what, if anything, can be done to improve learning outcomes in Japanese EFL classes for underachievers at the college level? What could happen for college students of extremely low English ability if the teacher, acting as a leader, were to discard the old rules, antiquated classroom procedures, and highly ineffective teaching methodologies that have been the cause of so much failure, waste and suffering? What might

teachers be able to do if they choose to actively explore ways in which they could use their leadership to counteract the forces that have led to the failure of English teaching and learning in Japan?

The EFL classroom: an excellent place to experiment.

Happily, there is a lot of room for change, innovation and improvement. All that is needed is for the teacher to take the initiative of acting as both a pioneer and a leader to invigorate what has otherwise become a very stale and self-defeating environment. Acting in that capacity, the teacher must find ways to overcome those traditional classroom behaviors and practices that are undesirable and counter productive.

This could be done in a number of ways, but this paper will investigate the potential for the teacher to effectively look at reinforcing students' affective learning variables, employ constructivist methodology, carry out effective assessment, and use leadership skills to better help students learn.

The EFL classroom is an excellent setting to use a constructivist approach to learning. Experiential learning also offers excellent opportunities for the students to engage in double loop thinking in the classroom. The teacher can tap into the students' affective learning variables such as confidence, anxiety and motivation while giving up highly centralized control of the learning process in favor of creating greater student autonomy. Teachers will have to learn how to stop lecturing in a top down, one way fashion. The traditional class monologue delivered by the 'sage on the stage' must be replaced with meaningful dialogue and the teacher acting as a facilitator. He must not only work at engaging the students in meaningful dialogue but also work at helping them learn how to join in a dialogue.

Excessive formality, isolation and extreme competition are a large part of the traditional Japanese college classroom environment that are especially responsible for diminishing and inhibiting student achievement. To offset these the teacher could introduce a more decentralized, group-orientated and team centered approach to learning. As the leader, the teacher could work both actively and behind the scenes to turn the classroom into a place where an emphasis on cooperation and relationships becomes instrumental in learning and reinforces a shared vision of what the real purpose and potential of the classroom is. Additionally, in line with the tenets of complexity science and chaos theory the teacher might seek to improve the classroom performance by standing back and taking a wait and see approach to learning while helping students (as a servant leader) to experience a more natural, unimpeded and spontaneous learning environment.

The goal should be to help the students engage in meaningful learning experiences through the act of sharing information and experiences while establishing rewarding relationships with each other, with the subject, and hopefully with a new notion of learning and living. Bringing these approaches into a traditional Japanese classroom will be extremely difficult at first, but it can be expected that once the students get the idea, they will never go back to sitting docilely waiting for the class to end.

Synthesis

The First Day of Class

On the first day of class the EFL classroom teacher should make sure that the students understand that this is going to be a classroom where they will really have a chance to succeed. Nothing will be more important than making sure that they understand and believe that this class will be different and that they are up to the challenge. The students s/he will encounter will very likely have become convinced that the EFL classroom is not a good place for them and that they are failures for not having learned English in junior and senior high school. They may feel that they are not good enough or that it is too difficult for them. The teacher is going to have to confront all the shame, frustration, and defeatism that inevitably accompanies six years of failure. In L. Spears (1998) K. Blanchaer says that “Leadership is all about going somewhere; it’s not about wandering around aimlessly” (p. 23). Sadly, many of the students who come to college freshman English classes have been going nowhere for a long time.

The teacher must bring vision to the class, and it should be the vision that constructivist education holds out for all earnest participants. It would then be excellent if the teacher could go on to propose a mission for the class in terms of affective factors and learning goals. Within the first few classes it would be a real source of power for the class if these could be printed and carried into class.

Initially it would help if the teacher can bring a little charisma to bear, but in the end charisma alone will never be enough. Unless the teacher can effectively engage the students and deliver on the promises that the vision entails he will soon lose the students’ trust. Another way to say this is that unless the students’ minds and hearts really start to change in class, then nothing will change and the students will revert to where they were in the beginning.

M. Krovetz (1998) lists the following as things he would expect to see in a high school school where students are using their both their minds and their hearts:

Minds	Hearts
Lots of student writing based on students thinking about issues that are relevant and important to students	Students working in groups in which every student is participating and individual accountability is clear.
Students working in classrooms, rather than students listening to teachers working.	Students serving as and receiving peer and cross-age coaching.
Student assessment strategies that evaluate the students depth of thinking	Students engaged in service learning projects.
Teachers modeling critical thinking through their engagement in action research projects designed to improve their own practice	Students engaged in learning about and contributing to the solution of real issues of concern to the students and the community.

Figure 1: This summary of Krovets's list of things he looks for when he visits high schools is adapted from the complete list.

In fact Krovetz is discussing what he would look for in American high schools. To expect all of this in an extremely low level Japanese freshman EFL class might be setting the bar too high, but it could be considered as a guide.

Constructivist Approaches

In choosing to follow a constructivist approach to learning, the teacher will be able to apply many basic principles of leadership. One of the strengths of constructivist learning is that it encourages teamwork and group learning as a way to promote the construction of knowledge. As a leader it will be the teacher's job to bring expert knowledge, in both methodology and content, to the task of groupwork and teamwork. For example, jigsaw learning is a group learning methodology that works extremely well in the EFL classroom. Miller, J., Reynolds, J., Noble, P. C., Altschuler, & L. Schaubert, H. (2001) found that it was especially effective for practicing oral skills and building learner confidence to speak in front of groups. By studying and practicing the use of such methodologies the teacher can do a better job of delivering on the promise that 'this class will be different'.

Experiential learning is another avenue that can offer rich learning opportunities if the teacher is experienced and prepared. A. Wurr (1996), who engages in Outdoor Education activities with his Japanese college EFL students, feels that this kind of learning is extremely effective in developing the participants "self-esteem, leadership, inter and intrapersonal skills, all of which...have a beneficial carry over effect on language learning and personal growth" (p.2). He also shows how the participants can engage in double loop thinking by debriefing and making connections to expand upon their experiences and further their understanding.

Debriefing and reflection are clearly powerful tools that the EFL teacher should master and exploit as much as possible in the classroom.

As a leader, another goal of the teacher should be to turn the classroom into a learning system. This will call for many leadership skills, not the least of which is courage, for as P. Clarke (2000) points out schools “focus on the maintenance of present systems, rather than the development of new ones” (p.6). In other words, the teacher will have to be willing to go against the tide and take risks, often without the meaningful support of, perhaps even in opposition to, the school. Clarke believes that it is not just how we teach but what we teach that is important if we want our schools and classrooms to become learning systems, and he promotes the following examples of subject and content as most highly desirable:

Subject	Content
Political	Globalization and democracy, the role of the individual citizen.
Economic	Changes in the industrial base of society, the information age.
Ecological	The need for sustainability, the recognition of ecological crisis.
Social	Changes in family and community structures.
Spiritual	What it is to be human; the role of belief and values.
Technological	The information revolution is the service of human growth.
Scientific	Cognition – how the brain learns; complexity – models to inform human systems analysis

Figure 2: This presentation is slightly different in format from the way it appears in Clark’s book, but the content is identical. p.37.

Clarke’s ideas are not the only ones the EFL teacher might want to consider. They are presented here as examples of the importance of having students engage in meaningful content.

Another methodology that the EFL teacher could choose to bring into the classroom would be the teaching of Learning Strategies. The idea of teaching learning strategies in class, as a way to help students become self-regulating learners, is gaining a great deal of momentum in other settings, but Tsuchida (2002) is absolutely correct in pointing out that it, “is not very popular in Japanese educational situations” (p.23). To create and conduct lessons

that truly foster the teaching of learning strategies would require a great deal of study and preparation on the part of the teacher. Tsuchida's article, however, gives enough theory and practical examples (such as a model lesson) to serve as a good starting point for the novice, but aspiring teacher. Intricacies of teaching learning strategies aside, Tsuchida sums things up nicely in saying that:

When teachers actually start to teach learning strategies there are two things they have to keep in mind, the first is to start with what the students already know...The second thing the teachers should keep in mind is that they always have to be conscious of students' learning processes. (pps. 23-24).

Tsuchida's lucid and detailed work outlines an excellent approach to teaching learning strategies, and with a little experimentation any ambitious teacher could probably come up with some excellent learning strategies of his own by referring to Tsuchida's examples.

To be an effective leader, the teacher must bring something to the table. If he comes to class with no plans, no ideas, no expert knowledge, no openness, no courage and no desire to bring change, then the students will not follow the vision and fulfill the mission. Useful constructivist methodologies abound. What is important is that the teacher, acting as the leader, decides on and prepares lessons based on those methods that will work best for the class. Ideally, making these choices would involve the students as much as possible. In a lower level college EFL class the teacher will have to make the necessary decisions and call for active student involvement, team work, individual input, and double loop learning. As a servant leader, this side of the teacher's role will probably become almost invisible to the students.

Assessment

As a leader, the EFL teacher will have to assume the responsibility of fairly and accurately assessing student learning and classroom performance. This will call for a great deal of creativity and expert knowledge. Because of the great importance of affective factors such as anxiety, motivation, self-image and perceived level of difficulty it will be important for the teacher to measure and record these, as well as gains in language skills such as comprehension, production, vocabulary acquisition and mastery of content. In this paper, priority is given to the consideration of ways in which assessment related to affective learning factors could be carried out.

A study by M. Bohn (2004) has shown that when Japanese students come to the United States to learn English there is a gap between their motivation (high) and their ability to

display effective classroom behavior (unsatisfactory). Bohn's findings caused her to suspect that although the students wanted to actively pursue their learning and participate effectively and appropriately in class, they had difficulty in overcoming the vast cultural barrier and cultural differences that exist between American and Japanese classrooms. These students worked hard enough in Japan to gain access to a real English learning situation, yet their experiences in Japanese classrooms did not enable them to actively and creatively engage in language learning. When they encountered a situation outside of Japan where creative learning and active participation was considered the norm they did not know what to do, let alone how to do it. In this sense, their Japanese learning experience failed them. Not only did it fail to help them develop a high enough level of language proficiency to use English as a tool for communication, it also left them unprepared to play an active role in their own learning. They had not yet effectively learned how to learn. Bohn's study shows that motivation, or the lack of motivation, is not enough to singularly guarantee success or failure in the EFL classroom. Its effects can be mitigated by culture. When classroom culture can minimize an important affective variable like motivation, a new set of cultural values is called for.

It is interesting to note that the students Bohn looked at are the few who can be counted as a success in the Japanese system. They did not give up and even aspired to leave the country in order to go on with their studies. They are the best of the best. But sadly, the vast majority of Japanese students never get nearly this far along before they give up and drop out. In doing so the shame is not on the students. The problem is not their fault. A more enlightened, effective, and humane approach to teaching and learning could easily change this outcome.

In taking a slightly different look at affective variables, Spratt, Humphreys and Chan (2002) investigate the role and interplay of motivation and autonomy in a study carried out among Hong Kong tertiary students. It was found that "motivation was a key factor that influences the extent to which learners are ready to learn autonomously" (p.246). Importantly, however, these findings would seem to contradict the notion that autonomy leads to motivation, and that perhaps the relationship is actually inverted, or at least goes both ways. In other words, the more motivated students are from the outset, the better they will perform and go on to become autonomous learners. The implication is that it would be worthwhile to work on increasing motivation prior to helping students to become more autonomous learners.

The study also yielded other interesting findings. In particular when asked about the relationship between the students' and the teacher's responsibilities (in regard to learning)

students delegated more responsibility to the teacher than to themselves in eight out of eleven cases. This would seem to be in keeping with the overall traditions, mindset and classroom culture found in many Far East settings.

To be an effective leader the teacher must try to understand and assess the students' needs and development in traditional and non-traditional ways. In the EFL class, attribution theory could offer another possible way of gleaning insight into the minds and hearts of the students. Williams and Burden (1999) carried out a small scale interpretative study of young learners (6-10 years old) living in southwest England and investigated their attributions for success and failure in learning French. Of particular interest were the ways in which learners conceptualized doing well and their perceived reasons for their own successes and failures. The findings showed that "most of the learners tended to judge their success by external factors ...and that the range of attributions increased with age" (p.191). Perhaps the most important implication of this study was the observation that unlike internal efforts such as listening or effort, intelligent effort was not cited. Intelligent effort was defined as "application of appropriate strategies for achieving success in learning the language" (p. 199). As the authors point out this gives rise to the speculation that although there is a great deal of literature on the importance of learning strategies and learner training it may be that "the important messages contained within the literature may not be filtering through to teachers in the language classroom" (p. 199).

Connections

EFL teachers in Japan have misgivings about many aspects of the classroom situation. It is not an easy job to do, especially if you are a native speaker. In fact the turnover rate for native speakers is quite high, and possibly because they have different expectations, satisfaction with the cultural and classroom settings is often very low. However it should be clear that there is a real calling for the right person, with the right frame of mind and appropriate skills to do exciting and meaningful work. As a skilled, enlightened professional and a determined leader, the EFL teacher can really make a difference in people's lives and address many of the problems found in modern Japanese society and education.

For the last ten years I have been placing special emphasis on placement testing and designing curriculum based on the preliminary results of placement tests. I have also made it a point to always take the classes with the lowest levels of language learning. I have done so for a number of reasons. Very few native speakers have the skills needed to communicate effectively with the students in Japanese. In these classrooms this is a really useful skill

(Weshler, 2002). Also, in terms of cultural skills I am extremely familiar with the behavior Bohn (2004) observed in her study. I have my own techniques for turning the classroom into a sort of halfway house where students can continue to draw on their traditional behavior while reaching out to do something new.

There is often a strong resentment or prejudice against college students who have very low abilities. It is common to hear teachers equate the term “good” with accomplishment, high motivation and autonomy (good class, good school, and good student). “Bad”, means the opposite. But to me this has always seemed very unfair because most of the bad students in bad classes at bad schools have never had a chance to really learn and succeed at school. I have always felt that a teacher saying “I don’t want to work with them because they have no ability” is like a doctor saying, “I don’t want to treat those people because they are so sick”. Not everyone who gets sick can get well, but everyone who wants to and gets the chance can learn. I always find working with the ‘bad students’ rewarding because you really do get to see an awakening. Their hearts and minds do change.

Inevitably I also have regrets and doubts, most of which are related to the need to constantly improve my own skills. I do not feel that I have mastered enough expert knowledge to do all I should. But that is why I am back at school, and I am confident that I am making progress on my goal of self-improvement. I also need to improve my understanding of how adults learn language, especially the fundamental linguistic and cognitive principles of adult language learning and teaching. There is always the need to learn about new and more successful classroom methodologies and approaches. As a manager, or perhaps a servant leader, I need to become a better researcher. This is of extreme importance as it will be through engaging and contributing to the literature that I will be able to garner enough support to promote my philosophy of teaching and learning. This will not be easy because the more prevalent and traditional approaches to teaching and learning EFL are well entrenched. They are also, I believe, destructive, or at best self-defeating.

One of the first things I was told (over 25 years ago) was that unpopular teachers would get more respect from the staff and administration than popular teachers. The logic is that if you are unpopular then you must be tough. You are in there cracking heads, making them work, getting the job done. If you are popular then you are just goofing off and playing in class. Obviously no teaching or learning is taking place. I said something like, “Really that’s strange” but inside I thought, ”This guy is really way out there. He doesn’t know what he is talking about.” It took almost 15 years of experience before I realized who was way out there and who knew what he was talking about. I have changed my tune, and almost daily I have to

fight the negative images that go along with helping students enjoy and benefit from learning at their level.

One of the biggest criticisms I have to deal with when I let the needs of underachievers dictate the curriculum is claims made by other teachers who say “That’s not college level”. In a way, that may be true. However, when you have a room full of students who do not know things like numbers, days of the week or the word, ‘its’, you will not end up teaching what is normally considered ‘college level’ in Japan. The students will do much better if they can start over at their level with a new vision, new mission and new approaches. It takes courage and conviction to do this. It also takes a little compassion and a belief in people. EFL teachers must realize that just doing their best and running a meaningful class is not enough. It is time to take up the gauntlet and step into the role of being a leader on a much biggest scale.

Conclusion

This paper investigated the failure of EFL in Japan. Teacher leadership, changes in methodology and assessment have been discussed as ways to address the problem and bring improvement and success to the EFL classroom. Although the performance of students and teachers in traditional Japanese classrooms has been dismal in the past, things seem to be changing. Now, more than ever before, the time is ripe for a new vision and a new way of doing things in the Japanese classroom. The EFL classroom is an especially auspicious setting to begin the quest for real learning, meaningful encounters, achievement and growth.

But just because the time is right does not mean that change will come easily or quickly. The teacher will need to display courage, creativity and have the deep resolve if he is to succeed against very great odds. More importantly, he will have to be a skilled practitioner who can use the positive results of the classroom to justify the changes that will need to be adopted if the final outcome of Japanese education is to be learning and not indoctrination.

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