

[Article]

The Creation of an ‘English Reality’ Environment (2): Effectiveness of Events and E-learning to supplement the English Curriculum

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要 旨

文教大学国際学部では、英語学習環境を整える目的で外国語学習支援室としてLanguage Garden (LG)を設置し、英語教育カリキュラムとの連携を図りながら効果的な自立学習を促進している。しかしながら、LG利用者は学習意欲の高い一部の学生に限られていることを考慮し、これ以外にも学生の英語学習を喚起し、対象とする言語を実際に使用する環境(English Reality)を提供することが、学習効果を大きく左右する。その手段として学内外との連携を視野に入れた、学生の目標となる定期的な英語イベントの開催と、継続的な自立学習を促すための学習教材としてEラーニング教材の環境整備を行っている。英語イベントに関しては、本学部の学生と英語に対する学習意欲の高い高校生がお互いに刺激し合いながら、英語学習に対する学習意識を高める目的で英語ディベート大会を開催し、また他大学との交流を深めながら英語の表現力を高めるオーラル・コミュニケーション・フェスティバルを開催することでその効果を狙っている。授業内外で活用できるEラーニング教材としては、アルク・ネットアカデミー2のスーパー・スタンダード・コースとTOEIC演習コース、さらにはBrainPOPを導入し、目的に応じて使い分けることで対応している。学生の英語能力テストにおける成績の推移ではその効果が認められているが、2012年度以降の新カリキュラムの導入にともない、さらにその活用方法を検討していくものとする。

1. Introduction

English language education at the university level in Japan has entered a very challenging, exciting and competitive era. With the decreasing number of college age students and a challenging job market, each university is trying to design new, dynamic programs and curricula which will attract and serve students better. At the Faculty of International Studies of Bunkyo University, we have two departments: the Department of International Tourism and the Department of International Understanding. The former offers courses on hotel and restaurant management and includes teaching eco-tourism among other subjects. The latter offers courses on NPO management, international cooperation, development and eco-business. Now, how can teachers develop materials and provide environment that would give their students a basic understanding of the vocabulary to function in such a diverse curriculum?

We teachers owe it to our students to give them access to material that may fit with what they are learning in their major or specialty courses. We must remember that our students are intelligent human beings with their own dreams, interests and career goals. Many of our better students are bored with basic English classes and they may stop learning if we don't offer them something more challenging and energizing. Advanced elective English classes and the development of a flexible English curriculum help the situation, but again there is a continuing problem of the specialized English vocabulary demanded by the students' majors. So how can we English teachers serve our students various needs and desires?

Faculty of International Studies of Bunkyo University has tried to find the answer by tapping into the energizing effect of learning centered education through our Language Garden project which we wrote about in a previous article (Shiozawa, et al. 2010). In short, the Language Garden is designed as a student-centered learning area where students can access various learning materials such as DVDs, graded readers, magazines and other educational materials for English study or to strengthen the various other foreign languages students may be taking to meet their second foreign language requirement. The Language Garden provides our students with a non-threatening environment in which they can communicate in English with each other as well as with teaching staff and teacher assistants about the things that interest them. The selection of graded readers allows the students to choose subject matters they like at a level that is good for them, e.g., comprehensible for their English level. The Language Garden can then be used as a common arena to exchange information in English about the book and videos they have watched. In this way, it can be seen that we are trying to change the emphasis of learning to a more student or learning centered approach rather than a teacher centered approach.

Without going into the debate between student or learning centered education and teacher centered education, it is essential to understand the two approaches. Basically, the former idea emphasizes learning rather than teaching in the traditional sense. The dichotomy of these two concepts may be difficult to discern at first as the terms are often used in defining each other. For example, one may say that learning is the result of good teaching or instruction. Likewise, one might say that the target or goal of good instruction is to have students learn something, a target subject such as English.

Many teachers have come to realize that it is impossible to teach a student everything one knows. The general acceptance of this limited ability to impart one's knowledge onto another human being can be seen in the often heard phrase 'I taught you everything you know, not everything I know, ' or similar words that express the same thought. At the very least, educators must recognize the fact that much of a student's learning occurs outside of regular teaching situations. Likewise, even good teaching may not insure learning among all the members of a classroom on any subject.

The inability of teachers to pass on their knowledge completely to students can be attributed to the plethora of various learning styles of the students, cultural background, classroom limitations, home situations, or even curriculum limitations among other factors. With so many factors influencing and/or restricting the student's pursuit of knowledge or information that may be important in his or her future, many teachers have started to change the focus away from teaching what they know to actually guiding students to what students may want to learn or need to learn. This shift then is to a learning centered approach in education. In this approach teachers try to reduce their own presence in the class and focus on the learning abilities of each student and search for material that will allow each student to feel that their needs, desires and wants have been met. In this way, the teacher may be seen as a coach or mentor, rather than as a traditional teacher passing on his or her own knowledge of grammar, vocabulary or other target subject.

This learning centered or student centered learning educational philosophy believes that by giving students power over their choice of study material and allowing them to set their own goals makes students accept responsibility for achieving their goal, and will make the students learn more. Through this process, the students are empowered and have a stronger sense of ownership of their materials as well as ownership of their goals, even if the goals are influenced by their teacher/mentor, the department and curriculum. Student

centered learning also allows for students to learn at their own pace and to study topics they enjoy and/or believe they need. By giving students more control over their choice of study material and topics, they may become more energized or at least more strongly motivated to learn a given topic. Hopefully, students will develop a sense of ownership of their topic, in this case, English.

In this paper, the two main trials that have been implemented at The Faculty of International Studies at Bunkyo University for the past few years are examined. One is special events where students use English, and the other is e-learning systems that students are able to use both in English classes and in their free time.

2. Hosting English Events

2.1 English Debate Tournament

2.1.1 Background

The first annual event to be introduced here was an English debate tournament both for senior high school students and college students. It started in 2007 with five teams from two different senior high schools and four teams from two universities. Both of the two senior high schools were what are called Super English Language High Schools (SELHi) which were assigned by Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology. In this English-focused program, students were involved in English debate in their daily English classes, so this tournament has been their good opportunities for the senior high school students to compete not only with students from other high schools but also with college students.

The tournament has been held in the middle of November every year and has been playing some important roles besides English learning, too. High school students are able to have chances to visit the university campus and have direct contact with college teachers and students. After the tournament, a social meeting with some snacks and drinks is held and all the participants can communicate with people from different generations. This meeting is also good opportunity for college students to communicate with younger generations.

The followings are the teams and schools which participated in the tournament for the past four years.

| Year | Schools | Teams |
|------|--|-------|
| 2007 | Inagakuen Comprehensive Upper Secondary School (Saitama) | 3 |
| | Shibuya Senior High School (Tokyo) | 2 |
| | Waseda University | 2 |
| | Bunkyo University | 2 |
| 2008 | Inagakuen Comprehensive Upper Secondary School (Saitama) | 3 |
| | Shibuya Senior High School (Tokyo) | 2 |
| | Konosu Senior High School (Saitama) | 1 |
| | Soka High School (Tokyo) | 1 |
| | Waseda University | 1 |
| | Ibaraki University | 1 |

| | | |
|------|--|---|
| | Bunkyo University | 3 |
| 2009 | Inagakuen Comprehensive Upper Secondary School (Saitama) | 1 |
| | Yamato Nishi Senior High School (Kanagawa) | 1 |
| | Soka High School (Tokyo) | 1 |
| | Saitama Municipal Urawa High School (Saitama) | 1 |
| | Keio University | 1 |
| | Obirin University | 1 |
| | Bunkyo University | 6 |
| 2010 | Inagakuen Comprehensive Upper Secondary School (Saitama) | 3 |
| | Soka High School (Tokyo) | 1 |
| | Saitama Municipal Urawa High School (Saitama) | 1 |
| | Aoyama Gakuin University | 1 |
| | Tokai University | 1 |
| | Bunkyo University | 5 |

2.1.2 Pedagogical Significance of the Tournament

Through preparing for the tournament, students have intensive English training such as reading English books and magazines to collect information and data, and practicing expressing themselves in English. Besides the English training, students have to get information about social problems and think logically. These processes make the students mentally matured. The propositions which were used in the tournament are as follows.

2007 All elementary and secondary schools in Japan should have classes on Saturdays.

2008 Japan should lower the age of adulthood to 18.

2009 Senior high schools’ English classes should be conducted in English.

2010 We should study abroad to improve our English skills.

English debate specialists are invited as judges. After each match, participants are given comments both on debating and English, which make the participants motivated more for their further study.

2.2 Oral Communication Festivals

2.2.1 Background

The Faculty of International Studies has been hosting an English event called the JACET Oral Communication Festival for the past two years. The festival started in 1996 to provide an annual venue where the university students taught by teachers specializing in oral communication perform public speaking, readers theatre, drama and so on. It also gives the teachers good opportunities to discuss methods and theories behind it. Teachers are also encouraged to perform oral activities or give lectures at the festival. The following is the program of festival 2010.

The 15th JACET Oral Communication Festival

Hosted by
JACET (Japan Association for College English Teachers)
Oral Communication Study Group
and Bunkyo University

December 4th (Sat), 2010 13:20 – 17:30
Room 6101

Bunkyo University
Shonan Campus

13:25 – 13:40 **Bunkyo University** (4th-year students)

Faculty: Yasuko Shiozawa

Opening Show

13:40 – 14:15 **Fuji Tokoha University**

Faculty: Tomoko Haraguchi

Creative Drama: "How can we support Prof. Maathai and the Green Belt Movement?"

14:15 – 14:50 **Kobe City University of Foreign Studies**

Faculty: Kazuhiro Nomura

Creative Drama: "One Day @KCUFS"

14:50 – 15:30 **Doshisha Women's College of Liberal Arts**

Faculty: Namie Saeki

Ethnographic Skit: "How Would You Act 'n React? -Our cross-cultural encounter-"

15:45 – 16:10 **Special Demonstration**

Oral Interpretation: "The Christmas Truce" ~戦場の清き夜~

Mr. Charles Kowalski (Tokai University)

16:10 – 16:40 **Nihon University**

Faculty: Takashi Kanazashi

Creative Drama with Songs: "What a happy Christmas!"

"Happy Xmas" (John Lennon), "Don't Look Back in Anger" (Oasis), "December Love"
(Gackt, English version), "Jingle Bells", "Auld Lang Syne"

16:40 – 17:15 **Bunkyo University** (3rd-year students)

Creative Drama: "Prejudice--an episode of a class--"

17:15 – 17:30 **Comments from participating teachers**

Ms. Sudarat Srirak (Prince of Songkla University)

Ms. Miho Moody (Nagoya University of Foreign Studies)

17:30 – 18:30 **Feedback and Networking Party**

at Faculty Meeting Room (2F)

Bunkyo has participated in the festival since 2004 mainly as part of English or seminar classes. At the festival held annually on a weekend in December, students from different universities, as many as 5 to 10 from all over Japan, gather and share their performances they have practiced either for a term or more. The majority of the students participate in the festival as a part of their course work; however, some students, as an extra-curricular activity. After each performance, a teacher comes up to the stage and gives brief comment. The audience writes comments on the evaluation sheet. After the festival a feedback session is held over a snack, where the participants evaluate and commend each other. Written comments and DVD recording the festival are shared among participating universities afterwards.

2.2.2 Social and academic significance of the festival

First of all, the fact that students from several different universities gather to perform oral activities is socially and academically inspiring. Participants pay close attention to the themes and linguistic level of the performances. In addition, as the sample program suggests, quite a number of performances deal with social issues based on the students' own experiences and research: harassment, job hunting, bully etc. Some also depict environmental issues such as water pollution and 3Rs (reduce, reuse, recycle) through their speeches and creative dramas. Intercultural issues like culture shocks and cultural stereotypes are also popular themes. These performances involve extensive research and discussions prior to the performance. Some even perform as a part of their thesis studies. Therefore, the festival offers a precious social and academic opportunity to share their messages and research results; it could enlighten or even empower the audience as well as the performers themselves.

2.2.3 Psychological significance of the festival

Performing in front of a big audience can be threatening; however, successful accomplishment will give the performers tremendous confidence. The participants, therefore, practice hard in order to attain the level where they feel satisfied at the festival. In other words, going beyond classroom gives the students the need for practice.

At the festival, most of the audience members are also performers. Both of them know the hardships of the practice and apprehension of standing on the stage. As a result, they appreciate every performance very attentively and empathetically. Feedback from those audience members is constructive. This way, the participants of the festival influence positively each other: an excellent learning environment.

2.2.4 Oral Communication as Art

Language is fundamentally vocal. The distinctive sound system of English can only be learned by intensive and extensive vocalization. English education has focused on practicality of the language; however, vocalizing English is also important from the viewpoints of education and art. Oral interpretation of fine literary work with proper attention to sound and rhythm of English is beautiful as well as educational.

Integrating English and other art forms such as music and dance is also artistic. For example, reading poems with music or singing English songs while dancing will enhance pronunciation and creativity. Thus, the festival has featured a number of artistic performances including music and dance.

2.2.5 English performance as entertainment

Humor is essential for smooth human relationships. A number of performances at the festival include jokes and hilarious plots, which may have helped continue conducting festivals for more than a decade. Students try hard to communicate with the audience and make them laugh. Naturally they learn to see things from others' points of view.

2.2.6 Students' comments

● Comments on making scripts and preparation for the festival:

“It was a lot of fun making scripts using dictionaries. I realized that direct translation does not work.” (M.W.)

“Through practice, I noticed I had memorized all the lines even of the others. I'm sure I have learned many colloquial expressions and improve speaking ability.” (H.S.)

“During the practice, we commented each other and improved our performance by putting our shoes in the ones of the audience.” (A.I.)

● Comments on the festival and their performance:

“At the festival, we actually communicated with the audience. Their response, like nodding and laughter, made us happy.” (M.W.)

“I'm glad our English made sense to the audience. I gained confidence in my English.” (R.F.)

As we have seen, holding a festival like this gives the participants a great opportunity to benefit each other in an accommodating atmosphere. In EFL situations, where language exposure is quite limited, holding a festival is meaningful; it creates semi-authentic needs and motivation for the learners to practice English.

3. E-learning

3.1 ALC NetAcademy

As the main e-learning materials for English education at the Faculty of International Studies, ALC NetAcademy 2 Super Standard Course was introduced in the fall semester of 2007. This e-learning system has been widely used by about four hundred educational institutions all over Japan and the effectiveness of it has been well reported. During the fall semester in 2007, the material was experimentally used in some CALL classes. Since the spring semester in the following year, it has been used as the main teaching materials in all the mandatory CALL classes for freshmen. ALC NetAcademy 2 Super Standard Course consists of three sections: Listening Course, Reading Course and TOEIC exercises. The first two courses have fifty units each, which have five different level's learning materials. The first half units of Listening Course are assigned to CALL 101 in spring semester and the latter half to CALL 103 in fall semester, and the first half of Reading Course to CALL 102 in spring semester and the other half to CALL 104 in fall semester. In all the units, eight steps are prepared and students are able to learn English by themselves with the guidance on the monitor. From 2009, students can access the e-learning material from their homes and they can use NetAcademy not only on the campus but also at any places where they can use the Internet.

Before starting each academic year, workshops for the teachers who are in charge of CALL classes are held, and the teachers can share the syllabus and exchange the information about the way of using

NetAcademy. Students are supposed to study most of each course under the instruction of their teachers either as classwork or homework. Teachers are able to monitor the study record of all the students once they access the teachers' pages.

In order to measure the English proficiency level of all the students, CASEC (Computerized Assessment System for English Communication) has been used three times a year. Since the introduction of NetAcademy, the average score rises from April to July, and from July to January, too.

To meet the demand of students, ALC NetAcademy 2 TOEIC Course was purchased in 2010. Despite the user-friendly structure, only a limited number of students use the new material. To increase the number of users, TOEIC scholarship was started in 2011. If students meet the following two criteria, they will be able to take the next TOEIC IP for free.

- a. To take TOEIC IP held by Bunkyo University Life Learning Center and to get the top three highest scores among all the participants.
- b. To study ALC NetAcademy 2 TOEIC Course for more than ten hours between the last TOEIC IP and the TOEIC IP that they took.

In the first trial, only ten students applied for the scholarship and three students were selected and got the right to take the next TOEIC IP for free..

3.2 Brain Pop

In addition to NetAcademy, we have made a contract with the New York based BrainPOP, an award winning on-line educational program provider. Founded in 1999, it has designed animated video courses for American education from K-12. They employ colorful animated presentations to teach students about historic events and personalities like Gandhi, Lincoln and Martin Luther King among many others. It also includes sections on math, science, environment, arts and such. We believe that this site may be very effective in supplying a comprehensive selection of lessons to meet the needs and desires of our students and that these lessons give the students a non-threatening, friendly and safe area to get basic vocabulary they need to pursue their career choices as well as to pursue their interests in history, famous men, environment, global warming among many more topics.

Several teachers at Bunkyo University have been using the regular BrainPOP for about three or four years and from this spring we were able to add BrainPOP ESL. The programs allow the students to use closed captions so that they stop the video and read the captions. In this way they control their input for maximum understanding. The closed captions make the BrainPOP lessons easy for the students to comprehend and absorb the knowledge.

Each lesson of the regular BrainPOP program is designed with a conversation between Moby, a robot, and Tim, a young man. Each lesson tells the story about a given historical figure, problem or issue. After the main video has been seen or studied, students have a choice among several exercises like Take the quiz, Read more, Activity Questions and answers and FYI(which supplies more written information about the topic of the video). Each of these exercises reinforces the information in the animation and allows the student to evaluate their own comprehension of the content. We personally have found that the Question and Answers section is great for a writing class as the questions can be easily organized into a simple outline and allow the students to make a written report about the subject by digesting the answers and writing several paragraphs.

Likewise, the quiz may be used to accomplish the same. The quiz may also be printed out as a study guide for the students before they view the video. The Read More section can be used as extra reading to increase comprehension as well as improve understanding, develop reading skills and increase vocabulary. The Read More and FYI section may be printed out as a reading assignment for regular classes. The Activity section gives the students a chance to write explanations, study vocabulary and helps to teach organizing skills.

The range of topics is so large that the teachers may allow the students to choose their own topic, or if they want more control of material or wish to introduce specific material, the teacher may opt for selecting the same video for the entire class. This method would allow the teacher to control vocabulary and allow for the teacher evaluate each student's ability to understand the selected materials. Giving the students the freedom to choose their own topics and could make the course and materials become more vital for each student. The tests can be printed out for each student and evaluated by the teacher.

For example, after the great earthquake that hit northern Japan, we thought students might want to know more about the vocabulary of earthquakes. We checked the BrainPOP site and discovered that they had a lesson on tectonic plates and how earthquakes are caused. Of course, the students knew the general ideas in Japanese, but had no idea of how to talk about earthquakes in English. The lesson we used in the class gave the students the English vocabulary to talk about the mechanics of earthquakes. The knowledge of this vocabulary might give our students more confidence when they meet foreigners when they are volunteering in the earthquake area (which many of our students are doing), but even for those who might not volunteer. We perceive that the internalization of the vocabulary will prepare them to discuss the earthquake with foreigners when they are on their study abroad programs and are asked question about the tragic earthquake.

However, BrainPOP has much more to offer than just earthquake material. Its extensive programs about famous people and places make it ideal to prepare the students in the basic history of the world that they need to function better in their future careers. 'How will this help in business' critics may ask? The answer is simple, people of or from a foreign country might be favorably impressed with the student's knowledge of their country or their local heroes. For example, if a student is planning to work in Peru, or visit or do volunteer work in Peru, it might be a good idea to visit the BrainPOP site and study in English about Machu Picchu, or the lesson on the Incas. They may have already studied the topics in Japanese and that is as it should be. Students, or any business person for that matter, should study about their target country or culture in his/her native tongue first, but once the knowledge is gained the student would profit greatly from studying the same topic in English or other target languages like Korean or Chinese, thus becoming, if not bilingual on a topic, becoming knowledgeable about the topic in English.

Unfortunately, our contract for the regular BrainPOP allows students to use it only on campus between 9:00am to 6:30 pm (teachers have full access on and off campus). This fact may make it difficult to use for homework in some situations. Fortunately, Bunkyo University has many computers and students can access them, so homework is a viable option for our students. Granted, by assigning BrainPOP as homework we might be stepping away from student center learning, but we consider it to be more similar to a coaching exercise. We do, however, use BrainPOP in CALL classes focusing on reading and writing and find it very helpful in helping students' writing.

So far we have been talking about using the regular BrainPOP, but this year we have contracted also for BrainPOP ESL which may be better suited for lower level students. Once again the lessons are conducted

through the use of animated characters and many games.

The ESL program is great for less well prepared students who are not up to the level of the standard BrainPOP. Our contract for BrainPOP ESL allows for it to be access from the students' home seven days a week at any time. Motivated students can access BrainPOP ESL at home privately or even play the word games with other students. We have also assigned students to study a given lesson and certain vocabulary and guided them through a few lessons. We have heard from several students that they have accessed it on their own and that they enjoy the colorful characters and the word games.

Is BrainPOP good for English students? We believe that it is great for teaching reading and writing as well as vocabulary. It is also a great tool that can enable students to learn English through numerous topics concerning our environment, history and the world in general. The large selection allows the student teacher team to access programs that will increase vocabulary in the selected area in a rather simple English grammar format. Additionally, we believe that many bilingual specialist teachers in fields like environment or economics might be able to use some programs to help their students understand their major topics better in English.

Whether you accept the idea of student centered learning or teacher centered learning, BrainPOP could be a useful tool for English acquisition in either approach. The design of the program allows for comprehensive input and allows the student to fulfill his or her own wants, desires, needs. It is a program that will help students master English and, hopefully, feel ownership of his/her own English dreams.

4. Discussion

To supplement the English curriculum, Faculty of International Studies established the Language Garden. This has been playing important roles as learning space for students. Though the effective environment of the LG, one of the problems is the limited number of the students visit the place (Shiozawa et al. 2010). To enhance all the students' English proficiency level, other opportunities and learning materials should be prepared outside the regular classes. In this sense, English Debate Tournament and Oral Communication Festival are good opportunities. However, the participants for these events are only from some classes, and the total number of the students from the Faculty is around one hundred. The way to increase the number of the participants and other events has to be considered.

As for e-learning materials, all the students have to use them while they are taking mandatory English classes for freshmen, but fewer students are using the learning materials in the following years. In the new curriculum going to be implemented in 2012, new mandatory English classes in sophomore and junior year will be introduced, so it will be a good chance for students to use them on a regular basis.

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