

The Teaching Assistant Program at Keiwa College: A Second Look

Joy Williams

For a number of years English language education in Japan has been in a period of transition; teacher trainees who are beginning their teaching careers as prospective secondary teachers of English are embarking on a journey with guidelines that are not clear and goals which may seem contradictory. There are several factors which contribute to this confusing situation: policies from the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) which seem to be at odds with the prevailing teaching environment, inadequate pre-service and in-service training for teachers, as well as the issue of learner-teacher beliefs in regards to the teaching of communicative English in the Japanese educational environment. In addition to these concerns, there is the on-going discussion of *if*, *how* and *when* English should be introduced in primary school curriculums and what kind of impact the introduction of English at primary schools will have on the teaching of English in secondary schools.

MEXT Guidelines

In 1988 the Japanese Ministry of Education (now called MEXT) stated that the teaching of English in secondary schools was failing. The following factors were singled out as contributing to this situation: limited exposure to spoken English, a lack of confidence in speaking English, large class sizes, teaching materials which are too difficult, and adherence to traditional teaching methods. Another point not mentioned by the Ministry of Education is that the examination system in Japan has tended to value the learning of grammatical facts more than communicative ability (Lamie, 2000).

In an apparent effort to address these "failures", over the years MEXT has issued various guidelines and policies in regards to English language education. In 2003 MEXT's new policy was to "cultivate Japanese with

English abilities" and along with this policy was a stated commitment to "intensive training programs aiming at improving teaching abilities to cultivate students' practical communication abilities in English." MEXT also stated that all English teachers should have access to intensive training to improve their teaching skills (MEXT, 2003a). However, these new MEXT policies do not "specifically address teacher preparation courses at universities, or collaboration between secondary schools and universities in practicum, arguably, the most important aspect of teacher preparation" (Iida, 2004, p.13). Although MEXT states that in order to meet its goal of cultivating Japanese with English abilities there should be a "system of unified instruction through each school level" there are no clear guidelines about how or when this instruction will be provided to prospective teachers (MEXT, 2003b, p.1).

Pre-service Training for Japanese Teachers of English

Although the situation is changing, it has long been argued that teachers in Japan have a relative lack of formal teacher training. Many English language teachers in Japanese secondary schools have degrees in literature but have not received any instruction in second language acquisition (SLA) theory, English as a Foreign Language (EFL) methodology and techniques, or testing; thus these teachers do not feel adequately trained for their teaching responsibilities at secondary schools (Brown and Wada, 1998). While there are many required courses that teacher trainees must take, courses designed specifically for developing teaching skills -- methodology and practicum -- are severely limited (Yonesaka, 1998).

Teacher trainees generally have very limited hands-on experience in the classroom environment. The period of teaching practice, which has been only two weeks long until recently, is rather short compared to the length of practicums in other countries (Yonesaka, 1999). Although students returning from teaching practice generally state that the experience has been useful and has influenced them profoundly, the practicums are not very systematic; actual training and supervision varies from situation to situation. Additionally, the busy in-service teachers, who are responsible for supervising students in teaching practice, usually have limited training in SLA and methodology themselves (Iida, 2004). Supervising teachers, who

directly assist student teachers with lesson planning, often perpetuate the methodological status quo -- the so-called grammar-translation method (Lamie, 2000). Even Japanese teachers of English who have received master's degrees abroad in the field of TESOL find that their training in methodology and linguistic knowledge may not be valued when they return to the Japanese educational environment (McKay, 2000). If experienced teachers reject communicative language teaching (CLT), why should pre-service teachers attempt unfamiliar methods? (Yonesaka, 1998)

Learner Beliefs about Learning and Teaching English

At the heart of this discussion on language education in Japan is the contrasting approaches to language learning: the traditional paradigm (which most Japanese learners are familiar with) and the communicative paradigm (the approach emphasized by MEXT guidelines). Through a review of the work of a number of experts in language education, the two approaches have been defined in the following ways. The traditional paradigm has the following characteristics: (a) focus on language, (b) teacher-centeredness, (c) isolated skills, (d) focus on accuracy, (e) discrete point tests, (f) traditional tests, (g) emphasis on production, and (h) individual learning. The communicative approach has these characteristics: (a) focus on communication, (b) learner-centeredness, (c) integrated skills, (d) focus on fluency, (e) holistic tests, (f) authentic assessment, (g) emphasis on process, and (h) cooperative learning (Renandya, Lim, Leong and Jacobs, 1999).

Complicating this discussion of differing methodological approaches is the issue of learner-teacher beliefs. Although most "native-speaker" teachers advocate CLT, some studies have suggested that Japanese teachers and learners have mixed feelings regarding CLT and in many cases feel more comfortable with the traditional instructional style. Many learners may prefer teacher-centered instruction with a focus on accuracy (translation) and learning isolated skills, such as pronunciation and grammar points. Teachers who do want to implement more communicative approaches in their language classes need to understand the anxiety that learners may feel with this unfamiliar method and explain to students how they can learn more effectively through this new approach. For teachers who want to implement a more communicative approach, it may be necessary to modify teaching

styles to adjust to learner attitudes and lessen student anxiety (Matsuura, Chiba & Hilderbrandt, 2001).

New Ideas for Teacher Training.

Clearly, students who are training to be English language teachers are at a crossroads in regards to English education. They are pulled in different directions by MEXT guidelines, by differing attitudes of what constitutes effective learning and teaching, by the existing "exam culture" and by the realities of their actual teaching environments. To support these teacher trainees there is a pressing concern for more innovative and systematic teacher preparation programs. Iida has suggested the following:

- 1 . Colleges and universities need to offer courses on public speaking, discussion, debate and presentation so that students of English can acquire high-level productive skills.
- 2 . MEXT should support a website for TESOL methodology designed by research institutes such as JALT (Japan Association of Language Teachers) and JACET (Japan Association of College English Teachers). This website would provide self-study opportunities for English language teachers working at all levels -- primary through tertiary.
- 3 . There should be more team teaching in educational institutions. These teams should consist of experienced native-speaker teachers with degrees in TESOL and qualified Japanese teachers of English. These teams would take leadership in introducing more communicative learning approaches (Iida, 2004).

Yonesaka proposes offering university-level EFL teaching methods courses for pre-service teacher trainees which would help them connect lectures in pedagogy to their own experiences as language learners. In this kind of course, various EFL methods would be introduced in an experiential learning cycle. This kind of course would also help student teachers realize there are alternative, realistic teaching methods -- not only the familiar grammar-translation method -- and that CLT is not "the exclusive domain of native speaker university teachers" (Yonesaka, 1998, p.203).

The English Teacher Training Course at Keiwa College has been a pioneer in offering a variety of innovative pre-service training programs for teacher trainees. The Teaching Assistant Program in the college oral

communication classes is one of these training programs for prospective teachers.

The Teaching Assistant Program at Keiwa College

As a way of providing student teachers with additional pre-service training and support, the Teaching Assistant program in the oral communication classes at Keiwa College was started, very informally, in 1997. It began with just two or three students in the English Teacher Training Course observing and assisting in the Listening/Speaking classes taught by native-speaker teachers in the English Language Program. The objectives were to provide teacher trainees with more in-class experience, to have them become accustomed to using English in the classroom and also to help them become more familiar with CLT approaches. It was hoped that this experience would give them more confidence before they went to secondary schools for their two weeks of teaching practice (Williams, 2000).

Over the years the Teaching Assistant Program in the college classes has evolved and has been more formally incorporated into the Teacher Training Course; participating students are now able to receive college credit for being TAs in language classes. The Teacher Training Course itself has also developed and teacher trainees now have more extensive opportunities for practical, classroom experiences; in their sophomore year teacher trainees are assigned to several middle schools in Shibata City for an internship program; in their junior year teacher trainees are encouraged to be TAs in the college Level I oral communication classes during the first semester; in the second semester these students go to Seiro Middle School for the required Teaching Practice 1 which fulfills new MEXT guidelines for students training to be teachers.

With these added requirements for teacher trainees, in recent years fewer and fewer third-year students were electing to be volunteer Teaching Assistants in the college classes. Faculty involved in the Teacher Training Program felt that students were missing out on a valuable experience. To remediate this problem, in the academic year of 2006, third year students in the Teacher Training Program were strongly urged by the faculty members teaching the education courses to take advantage of the college Teaching Assistant Program. As a result of this strong recommendation, all of the 20

third-year teacher trainees signed up to be TAs in the college classes. Although this large number of TAs presented some problems (which will be discussed later) having a significant number of TAs in the college classes provided an opportunity to re-examine the program as a whole.

Research Focus

The present study uses three questionnaires which were given to Teaching Assistants, their mentor teachers and the students in the lower level Oral Communication classes, to examine the Teaching Assistant Program at Keiwa College. The research questions were designed to help answer the following questions:

- 1 . How do the teacher trainees view their TA experience in the college oral communication classes? Do the TAs regard the college program to be relevant to their internship experiences at middle schools? Do the teacher trainees consider their in-class college TA experiences relevant to the future teaching roles they are expected to fulfill in middle and senior high schools? Do the student TAs feel that the experience is an important step toward becoming effective teachers themselves?
- 2 . How do the students who had TAs in their classes view these assistants? Are the TAs seen as role models? Do the younger students consider the TAs to be a helpful addition to the oral communication classes? Do the TAs help contribute to a more comfortable class atmosphere?
- 3 . How do the mentor teachers who have worked with the TAs regard their role as "model teachers"? Was having a TA helpful, or was it an extra burden?

Subjects and Method

Teaching Assistants

Twenty, third-year students in the English Teacher Training Course signed up to be TAs. Because of time schedule conflicts the TAs were only able to attend certain sections of the oral communication classes; thus, in most cases, about 4 TAs were assigned to the same class. Of the 20 who initially registered to be TAs, 16 students were involved regularly in the classes and responded to the questionnaire -- 7 males and 9 females. In order

to get academic credit for being a TA, these students were required to attend a minimum of 15 class times (out of about 30 classes per semester), as well as respond to this questionnaire.

First-Year Students in Unit B classes (Listening/Speaking)

A total of 85 first-year students, 41 males and 44 females taking Unit B classes responded to the questionnaire. They were enrolled in 6 different sections, one of which was the *Kiso*, or basic class, and another was the *Tobikyu*, or advanced class; four of the classes were regular Level I classes. These classes meet three times a week and students had been divided into class sections based on results of a placement test. There were 15 to 20 students per class.

Mentor Teachers

Five native-speaker teachers worked with the students as mentor teachers. All of these teachers had an educational background and experience in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL). Two of the teachers had more than twenty years of teaching experience in Japan, two of the teachers had been in Japan 5 to 7 years, and one teacher had been in Japan less than two years.

Questionnaires

Three different questionnaires were developed: one for the Teaching Assistants, one for the students in the first-year oral communication classes and one for the mentor teachers. The questionnaires for the TAs and the students were in Japanese, while the questionnaires for the teachers were in English. The questionnaires for the TAs were handed out in one of the required education courses for third-year students and they were given about a week to respond. Questionnaires for the students in the oral communication classes were given and collected during class time. Questionnaires for the mentor teachers were done by e-mail.

The questionnaire for the TAs consisted of 22 items, nine of these were statements followed by a 5 point Likert scale to indicate agreement or disagreement. After each of the Likert-style questions, there were open-ended questions where respondents were asked to explain their replies to the

previous question. Some of the TAs wrote rather extensive comments to these open ended questions. Topics of the questions concerned their attendance, their preparation, the activities they did in class as TAs, their reactions to being with younger students and their attitudes toward the TA experience in relation to their internship and practicum programs.

The questionnaires for the first-year students consisted of 10 items, five of which were statements followed by a 5 point Likert scale. After respondents selected their agreement or disagreement to the statement, they were asked to explain the reason for their answer. These questions focused on whether or not the TAs were perceived as being a positive support in the English classes, asked what kinds of activities the TAs had done with the students and inquired about general impressions of the TAs.

Items on the questionnaires for the mentor teachers were all open-ended questions. Teachers were asked to comment on the time they had to prepare with the TAs, their impressions of the TAs interactions with the students, the dependability of the TAs and whether or not having a TA was helpful to them. They were also asked to make suggestions related to the program.

Results

The questionnaires provided many interesting responses for consideration, and because many of the questions were open ended, it is difficult to fully evaluate all the information. Due to limitations of space the following discussion will focus primarily on questionnaire responses pertinent to the initial research questions.

Responses from the Teaching Assistants

TAs indicated that they did a variety of activities in class, with explaining things in Japanese, circulating among the students, modeling the dialogue with the teacher and demonstrating a class activity listed as activities they did most frequently. Of the 16 TAs responding, twelve of them indicated that they had attended class more than the required 15 times. Most of the TAs felt there had not been enough time for lesson planning with the mentor teacher.

When asked if their sophomore internship experience at Higashi Middle school had helped them to prepare for the college TA program, 9 (56%) of

the students agreed while 5 (31%) disagreed. (Two students did not respond to this question perhaps because they had not participated in the internship.) Students who felt the middle school experience had been helpful mentioned the following: they learned how to explain grammar points, they felt more comfortable being in the class, they learned how to make the class more active, they learned how to talk to and relate to younger students and learned the importance of the relationship between students and the teacher. Students who felt that the middle school experience had not been particularly helpful gave the following reasons: junior high and college students are totally different, motivation and reasons for studying English are different and class activities at college and middle school are too dissimilar. Another comment was that being a college TA was much easier compared to being an assistant in the middle school classes.

Eleven (69%) of the TAs felt that the college program was useful preparation for their future work as teachers while 5 (31%) said they were uncertain. Some reasons given for it being useful were: they were able to improve their own language skills by talking with the mentor teacher, they could appreciate the learner-centered approach (in contrast to the teacher centered-approaches at middle schools), they learned how to communicate better with students, they learned how to caution and discipline students in a positive way, they got good teaching ideas, and they learned how to follow up on students. One particularly interesting comment was "It was good to see how conversational practice, rather than grammar explanation, could be used to reinforce grammar points." Students who were uncertain about whether the college TA program would be helpful to them in the future mentioned that in the college classes they felt they were acting as interpreters more than as teaching assistants. One student commented that the college oral communication classes are totally different from the kind of classes they would be teaching at middle and high schools.

Although there was some ambivalence about whether the TA experience would be relevant to their future teaching careers, when asked if the TA experience had been personally meaningful, 14 (88%) of the students felt that assisting in the college oral communication classes had helped them on a personal level. Some of their comments are worth noting:

- I could realize that my own English skills had improved.
- It was fun! I learned how to communicate with younger students.
- It was a good review of English and I also learned how to make use of games and other hand-outs in class.
- I learned how to deal with unmotivated students.
- I could realize what I , myself, am capable of doing and what I am not capable of doing.
- I learned so many things -- I learned much more than I was able to contribute in the class.
- It was a great experience!

Responses on the questionnaires indicate that the TAs were a bit uncertain as to whether their participation in the class had had a positive influence on the younger students. Seven (44%) of the TAs felt they had been helpful, eight (50%) were not sure and one student felt he/she had not been much help. The TAs who felt they had been helpful mentioned the following: the satisfaction of successfully explaining something to the younger students, being able to give more individual attention to the students, and being a good role model. One TA said, "It was easier for students to ask me questions -- they didn't know how to ask things in English and I am closer in age to the students so I was more approachable." The TAs who were not sure that their presence in class had been helpful made the following comments:

- I couldn't answer questions accurately.
- Students helped each other, so they didn't need to ask me questions.
- I was more of an interpreter.
- I tended to give students the correct answer right away, instead of helping students come to the correct responses themselves.

As mentioned earlier, TAs who attended the oral communication classes more than 15 times were able to get academic credit. Interestingly enough, opinions about getting this credit were divided fairly evenly; seven (44%) of the students felt that getting credit was important, while nine (56%) students felt that they didn't care so much about the credit. This is probably

understandable in light of the fact there are already many extra required credits for students in the English Teacher Training Course. For most of them, an additional credit or two will not affect whether or not they have enough credits for graduation. However, one can surmise that many of the TAs felt it was better to get academic credit for their efforts than nothing at all.

One surprising finding from this questionnaire for the TAs was their response to the question in regards to keeping a written record, or teacher log, of their reflections on class experiences. Since students in the Teacher Training Courses are already so busy with other required courses, I had anticipated that students would respond negatively to the question about whether they should keep a regular written record of the TA experience. However, 10 (63%) of the TAs felt that keeping this kind of record would have been useful, 5 (31%) of the TAs were neutral to the idea and only one student felt that keeping a record was unnecessary. Almost all TAs who indicated that keeping a regular record would be helpful commented that it would be a useful reference about how to use text exercises, use games, make hand-outs and manage class time, when making teaching plans in the future. The TAs indicated that this kind of reflective teaching log would also help them be more conscious of their own activities and areas they need to improve.

Eleven (69%) of the TAs felt that the college experience would have a positive effect on their duties in the required Teaching Practice 1 at Seiro Middle School in the second semester. Five (31%) of the TAs were not sure. Most of the students who indicated that the TA experience would be relevant to Teaching Practice 1 said that they had learned how to interact and be friendly with students. Other reasons were that they felt their English fluency had improved, that they had gained confidence, and that they also had become aware of the importance of innovative and creative lesson planning. TAs who were uncertain about the connection between the college experience and that in the middle school suggested that college students and middle school students were completely different, and since in the college classes they had not actually planned or conducted the lessons, it was hard to evaluate the usefulness of being a TA in the college program in relation to their duties at the middle school.

Half of these third-year teacher trainees said they would like to continue to be TAs in the college classes in the second semester; the others were either unsure or felt they would be too busy. In actuality, in the second semester of 2006, none of these third year students continued as TAs in the college classes. Although this is unfortunate, it is most likely that with the required Teaching Practice 1 at Seiro Middle School, as well as the rather demanding course work in the Teacher Training Course, students just do not have the time or energy to help with the college classes. It would be useful to follow up on why teacher trainees discontinue their TA activities and to find ways to encourage them to continue to participate.

Questionnaire Responses from Students Who had TAs in Their Classes.

The questionnaire for the 85 first year students was considerably shorter with only 11 questions and their responses to the open-ended questions were fairly brief. Student reactions to the TAs were generally very positive with 90% or more of the students responding favorably to the following questions: Do you think the TAs helped you in your study of English? Do you think the TAs have adequate English language skills? Did the TAs take initiative in teaching you and in participating in class? Was it easy to get to know the TAs? Some of the reasons for the favorable comments were;

- It was easy to ask them questions because they are close to us in age.
- They helped translate things we couldn't understand.
- They could explain grammar points.
- They made English fun and motivated me to use English more.
- They gave me advice about English as well as other things outside of class.
- The TAs made the class atmosphere more cheerful and friendly.
- Thanks to the TAs I can speak English much more easily than when I started college in April.

Negative reactions to the TAs were: "The TAs just seemed to be sitting there. They weren't involved.", " The TAs didn't attend so often so we didn't interact with them or get to know them." These negative comments, which were few in comparison to the positive comments, came primarily from the students in the *Tobikyu*, or advanced class, who were placed in a Level II

oral communication class. Normally TAs would not have been assigned to this class, but this year, since so many had signed up to be TAs, students were assigned to this class in an effort to distribute the TAs evenly. It is apparent that when the learners are at a higher level, with more advanced English language skills, having a TA in class may not seem necessary, particularly if the TA's attendance is sporadic and his or her English skills are perceived as being a bit inadequate.

However, a large majority of students who had TAs in their classes viewed them very positively and felt they had contributed in many ways to making the unfamiliar teaching approaches in the oral communication classes understandable, not so "threatening" and much more enjoyable. Although these younger students had some suggestions, such as "Take more initiative!", "Don't be absent so often.", "Explain things in Japanese more, so that we can understand." most felt the TAs were role models, gave them a lot of support and felt very satisfied with the TA program.

- The TAs were wonderful! Thank you!
- I definitely want them to become teachers.
- Thanks to the TAs the class was easy to understand and it was fun for me to take the course.
- It was such a short time, but it was so enjoyable. I want to work hard to be like the TAs.

These questionnaire results indicate that the students in the oral communication classes appreciated the TAs, were pleased with the TA program and hoped it would be on-going. It is significant to note that many of the younger students regarded the TAs as role models.

Questionnaire Responses from Mentor Teachers.

Individual teachers, class situations and individual TAs differ greatly, so naturally there were varied responses and views expressed by the five mentor teachers. It was generally agreed there was inadequate time to do lesson planning with the TA. Reasons for this seem to be the busy schedules of the teachers themselves, as well as the lack of interest on the part of the TAs. In terms of being able to count on the TAs to attend regularly, the

responses were mixed. One comment was that in some cases, as soon as the TAs had attended the required 15 times, they stopped coming which was a disappointment to the students who felt they were just beginning to get to know the TAs.

The mentor teachers indicated that some of the TAs lacked initiative -- always waiting to be told what to do. Other TAs also seemed "standoffish" -- always staying together in the back of the classroom and not interacting with the students in the class. One teacher commented that " the TAs got a little caught up in just being 'in with the group' and were either not proactive, or not willing to appear to be proactive." Obviously assigning 4 or 5 TAs per class contributed to this situation. If there were only 1 or 2 TAs assigned to a class, their responsibilities would be clearer and they would relate to students more readily. In the basic skills class (*Kiso*), where only one of the assigned TAs came regularly, the TA was very involved -- giving students individual attention and taking initiative in activities with students. Also, for the students in this lower level class, the prospect of a communicative style English class being taught in English is a bit daunting, and having the TA to interpret, explain activities and be more accessible was obviously very reassuring.

When asked to evaluate the students' reactions to the TAs, the mentor teachers made varying comments. One teacher said the students did not bond with the TAs very much; it seemed the younger students were a little intimidated by the older students and could not easily ask them for help. Another teacher commented that while the students were quite impressed with the TAs use of English, they were a bit overwhelmed by the large number of TAs in the class and therefore did not interact with them so much. In addition to the observation that there were too many TAs in the classes this year, mentor teachers had some other suggestions for improving the current TA program.

- 1 . Make sure the TAs have a clear idea of their role in the class and what is expected of them.
- 2 . It is important to have time to plan lessons together and train the TAs. (However, the schedules of the mentor teachers are generally too busy to allow much time for this, so this is an area where TAs could be more pro-active.)

- 3 . The TAs can be asked to tutor the lower students in the extra time after the sixty minute class. This tutoring might consist of reviewing the text, going over test errors or explaining basic grammar points. Toward the end of the semester one of the mentor teachers had asked the TAs to do this kind of tutoring and found it helpful.
4. The TA opportunity should be limited to students whose English skills are good enough and who will also be fully responsible; TAs need to be actively involved not only in class, but also take initiative in helping students outside of class time. (To assure that the TAs can make this kind of commitment, some payment for the TAs may be in order.)

While the mentor teachers felt the TA program was good overall, they did express regret that they did not have adequate time to work with the TAs and thus felt a little under pressure at times. "I was happy to have TAs though occasionally felt embarrassed to be a 'model' teacher on the more rushed days!"

It is interesting to contrast the comments from the students who had TAs in the class, the comments from the TAs themselves and the comments from the mentor teachers. There are some obvious discrepancies and differing views among the three groups involved; nevertheless, this information is valuable as we consider ways to improve the college's Teaching Assistant Program.

Suggestions for Future Program Development.

Responses to these questionnaires have suggested several ways in which the current TA program at the college might be improved upon.

- 1 . Assign fewer TAs per class: one or two TAs is most workable. It would be ideal if the basic class and each of the Level I classes could have a TA.
- 2 . In order to provide TAs in more of the classes, the TA position might be opened to other capable, motivated students in addition to third year students in the Teacher Training Course. Prospective TAs need to be selected carefully; it is important for them to have adequate English skills, to have good interpersonal skills, to be able to take initiative and to have a sense of responsibility toward the role of TA.
- 3 . TAs need clearer explanations of their responsibilities in the class and

they need more training as to how they can be involved in class activities.

- 4 . TAs should assist in the classes throughout the academic year, not just in the first semester.
- 5 . TAs should keep a teaching journal (in Japanese). This reflective record of class activities and observations of students will help TAs be more conscious of classroom procedures, class dynamics and the interpersonal relationships between instructors and learners. This journal might provide important feedback the mentor teacher as well.
- 6 . As part of their duties, the TAs can be asked to provide tutorial sessions, outside of class time, for students who are having difficulty keeping up with course work.
- 7 . All of the above points suggest that monetary payment would help to encourage the TAs to be more actively involved and take their responsibilities more seriously.

Conclusion

Although there are no clear-cut, easy answers to the many challenges in English education in Japan today, I believe the TA Program at Keiwa College offers students valuable support in their training to be teachers.

Although it is difficult for teacher trainees to make the transition from the teaching environment at the college to that at secondary schools, through the TA Program the student teachers clearly gain confidence in their own English language skills and their abilities to relate to the lower level students. Teacher trainees are also better able to make a meaningful connection between theory and practice -- to apply what they have learned in academic courses to a real classroom situation. With experience in the college oral communication classes these teacher trainees can become more familiar with CLT methodology and will hopefully be able to integrate CLT approaches within the educational setting at secondary schools -- a challenging task, to say the least. Perhaps these trainees can develop flexible teaching approaches for the varying educational settings in which they may find themselves. Most of all, we hope that the students who have taken part in the Teaching Assistant Program at the college will feel confident and empowered in their abilities to use English for communication and that they

will play a constructive role in the ongoing discussions related to English language education in Japan.

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