

Team Teaching At Shoin Senior High School

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Introduction

Team teaching in Japan has developed as a standard for introducing Japanese English learners to the language and culture of English speakers. Team teaching (TT) is a common situation from elementary school through junior high school by way of the JET program or private contract companies whom outsource native English teachers (NETs or ALTs). To date, a reasonable assessment of these efforts to encourage English acquisition for Japanese students cannot be good. Student motivation, test scores, and communicative ability are decreasing. Why is this? Students are often confused by the conflicting messages that their English language education experiences present. At Shoin Senior High School these dual messages are divided into two tracks: (1) the tokushin students whose English lessons are structured around achieving high scores on admission tests and (2) the shingaku students whose English lessons tend to be more communicative. This dual nature of student purposes can also be seen in the relationship between a Japanese teacher (JT) and a NET in the classroom, where the JT often represents to the school and their students the goals of examinations and grades while the NET represents the vague possibility of using English to broaden their future experiences.

The Ministry of Education has encouraged English education in Japanese schools to be more communicative in nature and has encouraged the use of NETs in a TT setting for this purpose. While the ideal application of TT sees the NET and JT as equal partners in developing lessons to encourage and inspire students, TT can most often be observed in one of three forms: (1) the NET prepares and teaches the English lesson with the JT present as an observer and occasional disciplinarian; (2) the JT prepares their normal English lesson and provides the NET some time at the end of the period for games; (3) the NET leads the class and the JT translates for the students. Each of these common approaches to TT significantly reduces the value provided to the students and often demotivates students and teachers alike.

For our TT classes at Shoin High School, we work together diligently to develop tasked base learning (TBL) lesson plans. In a TBL lesson, we develop topic appropriate tasks in which the student interactions foster a feeling of safety and encourage the students to take more communicative risks. To accomplish these goals, we rely heavily on three stages of communication: (1) pre-lesson planning, (2) task work that involves negotiation of meaning, and (3) post-lesson evaluation and critique.

Pre-lesson planning

In our team teaching, there is a tight relationship between pre-lesson planning and post-lesson evaluations. We use our evaluations and observations from each previous lesson to help us make better preparations for the next lesson. Our pre-lesson planning involves looking at the lesson theme and the language included in the textbook and discussing what prior knowledge we can reasonably expect the students to have, identify areas of difficulty (pronouncing a word, recognizing the written word, complex grammar, detailed nuances of grammar, etc.), and what level of mastery we expect the students to achieve. Once we have a single vision of the lesson goals and where there might be difficulties in completing a task, we can find materials and develop tasks that best fit. All of this teamwork results in our written lesson plan (**Appendix A**). Our lesson plans are framed as “can do” (i.e.; Appendix A *I can design my own restaurant*) lessons which provide a positive real world context to consider the language. The *comments on the lesson outcome* portion of the lesson plan is for post-lesson evaluation and ideas for improving that lesson theme. It will, also, be used as a reference for developing tasks in other lesson themes.

Negotiation of meaning

Negotiation of meaning is a necessary skill to develop. Negotiation of meaning occurs when communication between speakers and listeners breaks down and they are forced to repair it. Unfortunately, many students are not aware of how to negotiate for meaning (i.e.; asking the speaker to repeat something, checking meaning “Do you mean...?” , describing things to work around missing vocabulary, etc.). TBL and TT create a classroom environment where students can observe and participate

in negotiations of meaning. They have the opportunity to negotiate with the NET, the JT, and each other. They can also witness the JT and NET negotiate for meaning with each other when trying to help students. For example, in the *I can design my own restaurant lesson*, I needed to check with Mr. Yamaoka for the meaning of a lot of food names and how they might be named or described in English. Students also had to resolve communication breakdowns in their groups as they developed the image and menu of their restaurant and the best way to talk about their menu.

Post-lesson evaluation and critiques

After every lesson we discuss our individual impressions and observations of what happened. These discussions are open and honest when critiquing each other. We evaluate the chosen materials, material presentation, student success, student involvement, student understanding, and any nuance that may be of importance for future lessons, such as two students who do not get along should not be paired together. I record these after lesson- conversations into the comments section of our lesson plan, which we can then refer to for our next lesson preparation and furthermore for refining the same lesson theme in the future.

IN THE END

The planning and communication we employ in our team teaching at Shoin Senior high School results in an English learning environment that is motivating and effective at improving student scores. This continuous communication is helping to improve our English lessons and curriculum.

Appendix A

Project 8: My Own Restaurant
Date: 1st Lesson Period

Lesson Work Plan	ARC	Skill	Interaction	Time	Comments on Lesson Outcome
1. Introduce Bryan 2. Classroom English handout 3. Explain project (simple Japanese explanation) 4. Form groups 5. Shopping warm-up (In their groups) ➤ Each member of the group gets a shopping list card & a card of food they can give away. Each S's card #s must match. ➤ Review Requesting Language: Do you have any/some...? Yes, I do./No, I don't. ➤ Note: when a S says yes. The asker can mark off the food item while the answerer marks out the item. They can only give an item once	C	N/A	T-S	5-7 min	1. This first lesson went well with all 5 sections. 2. The largest section (秋) proceeded slower because of shyness and size. 3. Using the <i>Heavy Rock Café</i> to bring awareness to the use of descriptive language helped the students with their form & function.
6. <i>Heavy Rock Café</i> ➤ Review the menu with Ss & go over unknown words or expressions. ➤ Students then write down what they would order from this menu & guess what their partner will order. ➤ Role play <i>waiter/customer</i> : demonstrate and assist with language as necessary.	R	Group – Vocabulary input	S-S	10 min	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px;"> <p>Interaction</p> <p>T-S = Teacher to Student</p> <p>S-S = Student to Student</p> </div> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; margin-top: 10px;"> <p>ARC</p> <p>A – Authentic task: tasks were students form their own language to complete the task</p> <p>R – Restricted task: tasks were language is restricted and students focus on form, meaning and fluency.</p> <p>C – Clarification: students receive instructions, explanations or additional information.</p> </div>
7. Groups decide what kind of restaurant they want & begin preparing their menu.	A	Pairs – familiarity with a menu & its role in the waiter/customer exchange	S-S	10 min	
		Group	S-S	15-20 min	

Notes for this Lesson: Groups are to submit their group sheet of member names & the type of restaurant they have chosen. **Notes for next Lesson:** Bring color pens/pencils and any other material they might need for designing their menu. Bring their dictionary (if they have one). Teachers will provide paper