

Bunka Institute of Language (BIL)

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I. THE CONTEXT

A. LANGUAGE SCHOOLS IN TOKYO

Teaching English in Japan is big business with many types and styles. Companies have English classes for their employees, before or after work hours. Many housewives study English as a hobby. School children study English for six years in junior and senior high school. Most colleges offer a varied selection of English courses. This chapter is about a particular English education program with a twist that I believe can make an important difference in students' lives.

The name of the school is Bunka Institute of Language (BIL, a small language Institute in the heart of Tokyo, Japan, in the Shinjuku District. BIL is part of the Bunka Gakuen educational complex, which began as a sewing school in 1919 and has developed into one of Japan's largest and most prestigious fashion institutes. It then extended to a two-year and four-year women's university, a language Institute, and a publishing bureau that publishes an art magazine, a homemaking magazine, and professional books.

BIL began its growth in 1980 with the English Department and the Japanese Department. The school is the equivalent of a technical or trade school in the United States. The story I have to tell is about the English intensive program that is a two-year program for Japanese high school graduates.

The English intensive program offers three courses of study: Business English, Secretarial Practice, and English Communication. The student body is made up of young Japanese women between the ages of 18 and 22. Male students are eligible to enter the program; and each year a very small percentage will enter. Most male students would not find it possible to step out of the career track to study in a language program.

This two-year program offers opportunities for the students to go to the United States foreign overseas study program at the end of both academic years. The emphasis of the first-year overseas study program (OSP) is to introduce them to American culture and family life and give them the opportunity to use their English in real life situations. In Japan the opportunity to speak English outside the classroom are rare.

The emphasis of the second year OSP is to explore social issues that are shaping and changing Japanese and American society today to see how these issues are being responded to and dealt with. One of the most important goals of the program is to enable Japanese students to see the important roles women and youth are taking in working with social issues.

B. THE CULTURAL SETTING OF EDUCATION

Japanese students appear to Americans to be quite a bit younger than American students of the same age, both in social maturity and awareness of the problems that world citizens face. In raising children in America, most families stress self-reliance from an early age; children should learn to take care of themselves. In contrast Japanese families encourage children to be dependent, which undergirds a group mentality. Japanese mothers tend to help their children with tasks (especially boy) long after American mothers would have expected their children to do such tasks on their own. The style of education is very different in comparison to most Western-style schools. Most Japanese students of elementary and high school ages have to work hard and for long hours. Many go to other classes and activities outside school and have very little free time. Most students are pressured and haunted by the entrance examinations, which literally decide their future. Most of us have heard about the suicides that occur when a young student doesn't pass the exams that are to deliver that student into the "right" university that will deliver him/her into the "right" company.

Another cultural factor that creates the setting for our students is that it is the dream of many of our students to work in a prestigious Japanese company when they graduate. The real situation for most of our students is they become OL's (office ladies) where they will be given long hours of tedious monotonous work but no responsibility. Some young women after four years in college or university end up serving tea or photocopying.

Let this suffice to better understand the situation in teaching Japanese students and to understand the situation both Japanese students and foreign educators face. The number of misconceptions is enormous; but it is all part of the educational adventure.

II. BUNKA INSTITUTE OF LANGUAGE

A. TWO-YEAR PROGRAM

When this program was started, we had three students in the English program; but the program has developed and the student body has grown into an unusual program in Japan. Three things got us to this point:

- an open, receptive administration which gave lots of support:
- a vision that human development methods could be used in this situation to develop student potential; and
- a cooperative, professional staff willing to go the extra mile for the students.

Of these three, the key factor was the open administration, who were willing to struggle through long, tedious, uncomfortable and confusing Western-style meetings. But they believed in their teachers and gave them strong support to build this unique program for the school. There are many creative teachers who want to educate students for the world they will be entering after college, but quite often they don't have a receptive administration who are willing to let them try new things and show encouragement. I also think some administrations have had tremendous problems with disrespectful teachers; and their programs carry the scars of those encounters.

The faculty of this school is a rich mix of ages, experience, and nationalities. In our brief history as an intensive English language program, we have had teachers from Britain,

Scotland, Ireland, Canada, USA, Columbia, Australia, Trinidad as well as Japan. This situation has created lively discussions on how to spell words; and we've created a truce on many points of grammar.

B. THE STUDENTS

After the two-year study of English, some students hope to get a job in a company using English as their work. Some consider English more an acquired skill to be used as a hobby. As Japan is very "test" oriented, many of our students take tests of certification during their time with us. These tests are Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC), typing tests by the Chamber of Commerce, tests for secretarial skills, and The Society for Testing English Proficiency (STEP).

III. THE HUMAN DEVELOPMENT FRAME

The human development frame that has been built around the two-year language program is a unique feature of the program. The standard skills are taught: reading, writing, oral, listening, typing, cross culture, Japanese culture, office practice, overseas trade practice, plus many elective courses. It is the essential framework for the core education of this program.

A. RESPONSE TO STUDENT NEEDS

Education has a very high value for Japanese families and university education is deemed "the best." When students don't make it into the university of their choice, they rush around at the last minute to get into any other school where they can be accepted. This is how many of our students come to us; we are the second choice. Some don't have a strong desire to study English intensively. So the beginning point for many is that they aren't sure why they are studying English. They feel like second-class citizens; and they are in a culture warped in our classrooms because the values and rules are completely different from anything they have known.

Motivation can be a real problem. Many teachers are surprised by this when they come to Japan because the world thinks that Japanese students are motivated, bright students, and many of them are, especially the students who study overseas. But the reality is that students are the same the world over; and Japan, in its affluence, has motivational problems with its youth.

B. THE PROCESS OF DEVELOPMENT

So this is where the work of human development begins, by grappling with these questions: How do we facilitate building a self-image as a winner? How do we help students understand this new environment in which the rules and values are different? How do we help students create their purpose for this two-year educational sojourn with us? How do we enable the students to begin to explore and understand the "real world" they will encounter when they graduate from BIL and begin work?

My vision for approaching these questions has been that we are building a human development framework of four programs within the two-year language educational program.

IV. THE PROGRAMS

A. FRESHMAN FORUM

It has been the custom the education complex to take incoming freshmen and groups on a four-day outing called the Friendship Camp a few weeks after they enter school. The main purpose is to let the students and teachers become better acquainted. The Bunka Gakuen Group owns two lodges in the mountains where the groups go on a scheduled basis.

The teachers' job was to keep the students fully occupied and having fun playing games, doing skits and charades, and holding contests. In this setting a teacher was in the role of playmate, clown, and buddy. Since students sometimes have trouble relating to foreign teachers, this was not a helpful start to the teacher/student relationships.

I have always found the most fertile ground for generating new structures and vehicles for image building occur among the structures already in being that are outmoded, lifeless, and out of date. It often appears difficult to generate time and a budget for anything new. So the key is to look for what needs revamping and imagine how to give it life to do the task of imaginal education.

So we began revising the Friendship Camp and called it the "Freshman Forum". The main theme was "How to be a winner at Bunka Institute of Language?" The first objective is still for them to make new friends and get to know the teachers; but the setting is one that helps build relationships of mutual respect and intentional collegiality that a good educational endeavor needs.

Another objective is for the students to begin to realize the importance of learning English in Japan at this particular time in history. Also they are presented with new guidelines and classroom values that are very different from their educational experience to this point, i.e., in the past they were not to speak up or ask questions in class unless called; now it is strongly encouraged that they do so. The Forum sets up the students to think about what it means to be a successful language student at BIL and create a winning plan.

The activities that help accomplish these objectives are various methods that help the students get a clear picture of themselves and what it is they need to do in order to be a winner at BIL. These activities were interlaced with outdoor and sports activities to give a balance to the experience.

The first day was travel to the lodge and orientation of the students to the lodge and its rules. The intent of the Freshman Forum was described so students could begin thinking seriously about the next four days. There was outdoor and sports time after the long bus ride from Tokyo. After dinner, we showed a movie, "See How She Runs," followed by a conversation about "Winners."

The second day the students began to think about the future. Since they have very little life experience, we had them choose two words that held their feelings about the

future and made a montage that represented their feelings. After completing the montages, each one stood up, showed their montage, and said a few things about it to the group. The montages were mounted on the wall, creating a framework of the group. The montages were there the whole time as a backdrop for their activities.

Next was a talk and skit on the importance of English in the world today. It was both serious and fun. Later the students began writing their own personal history. Using the categories of past, present and future, they were presented with many questions to stimulate their thinking. They wrote a personal story in Japanese about themselves.

The third day the students are given a talk on "How to be a winner at BIL" and presented with an image of those 16 items to consider. Writing in workbooks they seriously work on each item, one by one, answering these two questions for each item: What decisions do I need to make (relative to that specific item)? and "What practical steps do I need to take to accomplish my decisions?" Each student does a time schedule to help them carry out their decisions. The last night is comprised of skits prizes. It is a fun, celebrative time to cap off the entire event.

On the final day there is a reflection on the Forum and preparation for leaving the Lodge and the long trip back to Tokyo. At the end of each of the four days, there is a journal page written by the students. All the work of the Freshman Forum is contained in a workbook that each student has. The workbook is in English; but students are allowed to use Japanese in order to express what needs to be expressed. The workbooks are collected the following week by the homeroom teachers who read them to get to know the homeless students more quickly and in-depth. In our school, all first-year homeroom teachers are bilingual Japanese teachers.

After the Freshman Forum, the image of the list of "How to be a winner at BIL" is posted in all the first year classrooms as a visible reminder. Throughout the year, follow up activities are conducted during the homeroom period: on the movie and discussion, reflections on their personal story, the image of "How to be a winner", the time design they created for themselves, and reflections since the Forum. This gives the teachers a way to come back to things we have deemed important to help the students begin to think and act in different ways.

B. 1ST YEAR OVERSEAS STUDY PROGRAM (OSP)

Overseas study programs are very popular in Japan. School trips are a common part of a Japanese student's education. BIL began its first OSP several years after the school opened; and the first foray was for a few students and primarily a sightseeing trip. As the numbers grew, teachers were asked to go with the students and provide a daily study program. The students have homestays with each student living with an American family for the month-long program. They are bussed to school Monday through Friday. There are weekly excursions planned so that they get to see some of the city and its special places. San Diego, California is the chosen spot for our school OSP. It takes place the last part of January to February. Going to the west coast keeps the travel costs down and of course the climate in San Diego; and of course the climate in San Diego in winter makes it appealing.

When studying the English language intensively in Japan there are few or no opportunities to use it. One needs strong motivation in order to continue and succeed. Our plan to give the motivation needed is to send all the first year students to the United States for one month where for the first time they need English to survive.

We learned many things in the early years of the program, which helped us create a learning environment that allows the students to grow in many dimensions. English is just one of those dimensions. Some of the things we learned with that the experience of being in a foreign culture for the first time creates many diverse reactions we could never have anticipated, both positive and negative. The everyday stuff of life that we usually don't give a second thought about becomes magnified and problematic, such as food or bathing. It is possible for Japanese students to spend time in a foreign culture and never experience it nor interact with it to any great extent. Many students have no idea what is expected of them in these new situations. We were clear that the learning environment was rich for a transformative experience if we carefully prepared the students and facilitated their learning while in San Diego and helped them problem-solve their own situations.

We began in a small way by having weekly OSP preparation classes in Tokyo in September. We let the students know what we were asking them to commit themselves to in order for this experience to be all that it could be for them. They were presented with "15 Arenas of Commitment"; and said "You only have to remember 15 things." We would carefully explain one each week. By the time departure came, they had a fairly clear idea of what was expected of them. It was important to give practical information that would help them cope. It was also important to remember that fear and fascination is an important part of the experience too.

A daily journal enabled them to notice their environment. The journal raised consciousness that would not have happened if they had been left on their own. The journal pages were designed with a varied focus and to fit the pattern of their week. These journal pages were recycled in class the following day in oral practice and appropriate questions were chosen to share. Teachers could get clues as to where the students were having problems and enable them appropriately.

We decided the host families of each student would be the "textbook" for the first-year program. We gave the students a contentless outline to help them write about their host family. They described the individual members. They were to compare daily patterns, communication styles, modes of affection, leisure and recreation choices, and compared their American host family with their own Japanese family. The homework section of the workbooks includes lessons that help them find information about practical elements of their stay in the United States: getting acquainted with United States money, using the postal service, using telephones, fast foods, the supermarkets, the department stores, and the school system.

One of the highlights of the trip is a morning spent at an elementary school where a cultural exchange takes place. Our students decide each year what they want to show the elementary school students, often choosing writing each student's name in Japanese on a name tag, singing a Japanese song, doing a finger play, and of course

showing them the Japanese art of paper folding, origami. The American schools have been enthusiastic about setting up this visit because of the obvious benefits for them. This first year program introduces students to American culture and gives them a real situation to use English as a tool for survival. The program changes lives as you can well imagine. For most of the students it is "The Event" of their lives to date.

C. GROWTH PLANNING SEMINAR

In the second year the setting for the students is very different. They have all spent a month in the United States in the OSP. This provides most students with renewed motivation to study English intensively for a second year. Almost all the students are comparable with the school and classes. But in the second year most of them face getting a job.

In Japan job hunting is well-orchestrated event. Students seeking certain types of jobs all start in a certain month; for our students it is June. They attend company information meetings to find out about the company. Then they try to get interviews with the companies that interest them and they think they have a chance with. They undergo stressful interviews as well as take company tests. If they are chosen, they begin training the following March and enter the company in April as an employee. This is a high stress time in which the students are often absent from classes and yet expected to keep up with their studies.

Not all students are looking for job. Some students aspire to more education, study abroad, or going to university classes or classes in domestic arts as most girls do plan on getting married.

We began to think about what are students needed to help them handle the second year at BIL as they prepared to go out into the business community or education world for more study. On the whole, they were very weak in planning skills and knowing what they wanted in the future. We created a four-day seminar called the Growth Planning Seminar offered during the four days of Freshmen Forum.

During these four days, we attempt to "seed their imaginations" to get them to think about their future. We teach them simple goal-setting skills, which we practice during the seminar. They are to set one goal by the end of the four days that they will work on that they will work on during the year with their homeroom teacher acting as a mentor.

We begin by having them evaluate the past year to help them realize how much they have changed and grown. It grounds them in their present situation so they can move on realistically from there. In order to get them to think about their future several methods are used. We bring in four former BIL graduates to talk to the students about what they have been doing since they left school. We look for students at have varied experiences: study abroad, working for a Japanese company, working for an international company, going abroad on a working holiday visa, working for an airline. This is always the most popular part of the seminar, because they learn best from the people closest to their experience; and it seems to stretch their imaginations about what is possible for them.

We do a visualization for students to have them "Go five years into the future and walk around in that future." They write about what they saw and what they want for their future life. For many it is the first time to do that kind of thinking.

One afternoon there is a session on grooming and office manner led by a professional cosmetics company who offer these sessions for young women starting job hunting. We continue the theme of "How to be a Winner" in a practical dimension. The male Japanese teachers and staff create a similar experience for the few boys that are part of the program.

By the end of the seminar, students have had practice in short-term goal setting and set a goal for the term or the year they would like to pursue. The four-day program ends with an afternoon celebration which students plan and implement themselves in homeroom groups to build group identity.

The homeroom teacher collects their program booklets and reads their work and journal writing to get in touch more quickly with the students. A schedule is set up by each homeroom teacher with their students. The usual pattern is to meet with two students at a time for about an hour. The student is given a checklist of the things that the teacher hopes to accomplish during the mentoring sessions. The teacher checks the student's goal and why that is important for them to accomplish. Sometimes a teacher may discover that the student has put down something that they don't really want to do; someone else thinks they should do it or they had to write something and had no idea what to write. The teacher's task then is to ask questions that might elicit something the student would like to do. Is very important to suspend judgment about the things they choose and realize you are teaching a life method that may be helpful to them now and in the future, if they get a chance to see the method works for them.

After the goal selected, the next task is to list all the tasks that will be important to do in order to accomplish the goal. These tasks are put on a time schedule: yearly, quarterly, monthly, daily and/or combinations of each. I often ask students at the end of this session, "If I could take a picture of you accomplishing this goal, what would I see?" This is difficult for some, but a helpful question I believe.

The follow up sessions of mentoring are to check progress, unblock problems, and to remind them what they want to do in the long run. Toward the end of the year, when some of them have met their goals, we celebrate. Enjoying a "chocolate" reward, we have a reflective conversation: What was difficult about realize this goal? What did they learn? How does it feel to be a winner? How might they use growth planning in the future? Who might be a mentor or support for them? Second year foreign homeroom teachers have reported that though this is not an easy process to do, they feel for the first time that they have a good way to get to know the students personally and know what their needs are for the second year.

D. SECOND YEAR OVERSEAS PROGRAM

Without the experience of the first year OSP, we could never do what we do in the second year OSP. In the first year students are struggling with food, family style, language, and the casualness and informality of Americans. For the most part they are ready to move on. We have been concerned about the apparent lack of knowledge

or involvement in social concerns so we focused on "social issues" as the second-year theme that would draw them into unique communication engagement for their second trip abroad.

We begin preparing students six months before departure. In a semester-long social issues course, the students begin by becoming immersed in the social issues that concern them. We help them choose a topic, teach them simple research methods and how to find resources, and then assign them to be out researching and interviewing sources in Tokyo. Most are not aware of various problems of education, environment, women and children which they self-select. By studying the issues first in Japan and becoming aware of the same problems at home before going to North America, they are able to have a basic working knowledge of their topics that allows them to understand what they see and experience abroad.

Students choose a specific social issue of their choice like: endangered plants/animals, alternative styles of education, child abuse, handicapped children, women's job opportunities, dropout students, or AIDS and substance abuse.

This year we had a speaker from the AIDS Foundation come to our classroom and the impact was tremendous. His first words were, "I am a gay white male with AIDS; and I have had AIDS for ten years." (In Japan it was national news when one Japanese declared that he had AIDS.) The speaker walked with the aide of a cane; and after writing on the board, he had to sit down because he felt weak. He said to the girls, "I know that some of you are thinking that I'm not a good person; and I want you to know that I don't care about that. What I care about is that none of you ever gets AIDS." He gave them lots of important information. He was scheduled to be with us for an hour; but he stayed for two and a half hours. He could feel how interested the students were in what he had to say even though they don't say much.

In turn he learned a lot about AIDS in Japan from the students who had studied it earlier in the year. Can you imagine the feeling of those students as they were questioned and could give information to this man? Most of our students have difficulty formulating an opinion about things because they aren't looked upon as having enough knowledge or experience to have anything to say. I had no idea what they would think about this; but I cried over their homework when they wrote about this visit. They all said it was an amazing opportunity for them and thought he was a wonderful man they would never forget. I know I certainly felt that way. The issue of AIDS is a whole new reality for me now.

After choosing a topic, three or four form a "unit" and begin research. As units they visit schools, volunteer groups, government offices, social welfare offices, and other organizations in Tokyo to gather information. The research is usually done in Japanese; but the product for this phase is written findings of their research in English. During this time telephone and interviewing skills are taught to enable a professional style in setting up appointments, presenting themselves, and getting the information they need. We enable them to find the resources they need.

Despite a carefully structured process, the tasks are open-ended enough to allow student creativity and initiative. One unit appeared one day to show their teacher a

stack of papers. They had decided to survey the student body on their attitudes towards AIDS, and came to ask permission to distribute it. The planning, writing, and printing had already been done by the unit on their own. This creativity and initiative continues throughout the research phase of the course with features acting more as resource person than project directors.

Other aspects of the schools curriculum provide integrated support for the OSP. A cross-culture course explores American communication patterns with small student-led discussion groups on the book, *Polite Fictions*. Reading, listening and speaking classes help prepare students for research and interviewing in America. Project reports are required on final products, so English writing and typing classes become practically relevant to the students. Thus the program becomes a good example of how a whole language approach can reinforce the various skills that learning English requires.

A San Diego office of the Language Institute provides coordination of the activities for the overseas portion of the program. Once in San Diego, the students spend three days a week in classes and two days on site visits to various schools, organizations, institutions and social welfare agencies, depending on the topics they choose. For the visits a large group of 24 go to a site with each unit having a defined role for the information gathering. Tasks include: writing a site description, collecting names and resources, interviewing people, taping responses, or taking photographs. Following each site visit, a thorough debriefing session enables students to process what happened, share experience, or get what they may have missed. Speakers and programs also come to the classrooms for further input. A watchful eye is needed to look after the balance between the excitement of all the input and student overload.

Each student stays with a host family for the duration of the trip. An OSP workbook is created for the students to write experiential episodes from the *Polite Fictions* textbook, so the work from the Tokyo classrooms is recycled in the real situation. All student experiences are viewed as an opportunity for education.

Part of their homework is to have guided conversations with their host families on in-depth topics. During the first week the host families are told by the students about their research project and asked to help them find people to talk to, articles to read, and TV shows to watch so the family can understand and be involved with the students.

One of the trip highlights has been the day the students spend at Lazzaro Cardinas high school in Tijuana, Mexico. Japanese students are paired with Mexican students as pen pals and begin writing to each other in November before the visit. On the day the Japanese students arrive, they are met at the bus by their pen pal, and they spend the day together. They are partners visiting classes, watching the student production of traditional Mexican singing and dancing, eating lunch together, and having a roundtable discussion. The pen pal idea provides a "people to people" contact, rather than having two groups looking at each other, not sure of what to do. The Mexican students are very warm hosts and eager to learn from our students. For them, learning English as an occupational necessity, and speaking it as a second language makes a Japanese student feel more relaxed than with American students. Deep friendships are established which have continued on in many cases.

Another place that is an eye-opener is Garfield High School where all of San Diego sends its pregnant teenagers, teen mothers, and drug and alcohol problems. There is a nursery for the babies so the girls can continue their education and get trained in effective parenting. Some of the teenagers asked what happens in Japan if a fourteen year old got pregnant. The Japanese students said the girl would have to have an abortion. The American students gave a strong negative reaction to that answer. It caused a lot talk among our girls afterward and an unease about their answers and the reactions that they received, causing them to think about the "stock answers" they were used to. One girl wrote in her homework, "Japanese girls too easily say that they would have an abortion. What they don't realize is that if they do this they will have a broken heart." Enough said.

Returning home, the units rush to prepare their highly illustrated project reports before graduation. They are exhausted but so moved by the experience that they express worries that they may lose this new found consciousness and courage once they enter the business world with its rigidly expected roles. One group came up with an idea to me from time to time as a support group to keep this experience alive. "What more could a teacher ask for!" commented one instructor after hearing the plan.

The program shows that independent pairs of learners investigating issues of their choice can use English creatively and actively. Despite generally lower entry levels of English than university students, a much greater progress, confidence and maturity developed in just two years is immediately apparent when talking with these young students. It would be interesting to document the English achievement, although personal development may be a far more important result.

The OSP also illustrates how to build a program from the bottom up. It took years of experimenting and making mistakes to develop the design described. Anyone attempting these kinds of study tours should expect about five years of trials before they have a stable program and process that can enable the students in this type of endeavor.

CONCLUSION

The story told here about our small language institute is from my understanding perspective. Not everyone working at BIL sees this or understands about imaginal education and human development. After these programs were created from the perspective I have written about here, they were passed on to the care of others who have been trained to do these programs. The programs then have been changed and improved from the professional point of others. For whatever reasons, BIL was open to letting us try these things and they are now a permanent part of the curriculum.