

JALT2007

Challenging Assumptions
Looking In, Looking Out

A college-level *Teaching English to Children* course

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Reference data:

Niiyama, M. (2008). A college-level *Teaching English to Children* course.

In K. Bradford Watts, T. Muller, & M. Swanson (Eds.), *JALT2007 Conference Proceedings*. Tokyo: JALT.

This is a practical report on a *Teaching English to Children* course, which was established at a private university in Japan three years ago. The report describes how such a teacher training course was set up at that university, and shows how the students learned the theory of teaching English to children and developed their teaching skills in this course. It also introduces some of the methods employed in the course in order to encourage students' active involvement and give them a sense of achievement. Finally, it discusses the importance of both theory and practice in such courses, and addresses some problems and future implications.

本稿は3年前に実在するある日本の私立大学で設立された「児童英語教育コース」についての実践報告である。そのような児童英語教員養成講座がどのように設置され、その中でコースに所属する学生たちがどのように児童英語教育の理論を学び彼らの教授力を養っていったかを報告する。また学生たちに積極的な参加を促し、達成感を味わってもらうためにコースの中で使用された活動を幾つか紹介する。そして最後にこのような教員養成コースではいかに理論と実践の両立が大切であるかを論じ、幾つかの問題点、将来への課題を述べる。

Introducing English education into elementary schools has been highly controversial in Japan (Ootsu & Torigai, 2002; Matsukawa, 2004). However, in 2002 it was included as part of the activities for international understanding, and in 2006 the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology finally announced that they would introduce English into all public elementary schools in Japan as a required subject within two years. Although much discussion is still needed, particularly regarding teacher training (Kanamori, 2003; Matsukawa, 2004; Higuchi, Kanamori & Kunikata, 2005), frequent courses and study meetings aimed at teacher training have been held, and some colleges and universities have already started to develop teacher training courses related to teaching English to children. However, their approaches vary according to the restrictions of their institutions and other factors.

The purposes of this practical report are to present one actual college-level teacher training course and to explore the potential of such courses in Japan. The report describes three years' activities of a teacher training course established at a private university in Japan. It particularly focuses on the activities of the 1st students in this course. Although the course had several limitations in terms of its curriculum and management, through the three years of coursework, the students learned the theory and methods of teaching English to children and developed their teaching skills. The report first introduces the steps they took, and next shows how they became capable of teaching English to children through simulating and practicing teaching, and their teaching practicums.

Course outline

The university in this report is a 4-year private school in Japan. It was previously a women's university, but a few years ago it became coeducational. Although its size is quite small, it has 6 departments and each department has 2 or 3 courses. The *Teaching English to Children* course started in April, 2003. It was set up as one of the courses in the Department of English and American Literature. The department offers 3 courses, including a *Translation* course, *Literature & Visual Culture* course and *Teaching English to Children* course. Students decide which course to take when they become 2nd year students. The main reason why the university started this course was that they expected English would be a required subject at elementary schools in the near future, and a teacher training course would be much in demand.

The 1st students to take this course were eight in total including one male and seven females. In the 3-year course, the students met once a week each year, with each class lasting 90 minutes. The goals of the course were to learn the theory of teaching English to children and to develop teaching skills through practicums at actual English classes for children.

Course syllabuses

With reference to teaching theory (Scott & Ytreberg, 1990; Nakamoto, 2003) and the existing curriculums of some colleges and universities, the syllabuses of this course were structured as in Table 1.

Table 1. Teaching English to children course: Course syllabuses

Year	Course Syllabuses
2nd year (2004)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1st term: learn Phonics • 2nd term: learn English picture books and children's literature from the view point of early English education
3rd year (2005)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1st term: learn the theory of teaching English to children (child language acquisition, teaching methods, making teaching plans, class management, etc.) • 2nd term: observe actual English classes to children, simulate and practice teaching by teaching classmates
4th year (2006)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1st term: learn basic concept of second language acquisition, practicum at actual English classes for children • 2nd term: practicum at actual English classes for children, make a report book (graduation work), give a presentation on it at the meeting for presenting graduation works

This table shows the three years' activities that the students are actively engaged in. Since there was only one instructor (teacher trainer) for this course, some limitations might be recognized. The 2nd year was a kind of preparation for the next two years. The students learned phonics in the 1st term and English picture books and children's literature from the view point of early English education in the 2nd term. Both phonics and picture books are important educational materials for teaching English to children. Phonics is "a method of teaching children to read... Children are taught to recognize the relationship between letters and sounds" (Richards, Platt & Platt, 1985, p.274). In Japan, they have been used mainly for teaching children the sounds of the English letters. Therefore, the students learned the basic rules of phonics. Next in the 3rd year, the students first learned the theory of teaching English to children, including child language acquisition, teaching methods, making teaching plans, and class management. In the 2nd term, they observed actual English classes for children and simulated and practiced teaching by teaching each other. Finally, in the 4th year, they conducted practicums at actual English classes for children, and made a report book as their graduation work.

Simulating and practicing teaching and teaching practicums

It is true that theory plays important roles in educational settings, and in this kind of teacher training course, opportunities for practice are indispensable. Table 2 presents the steps the students took when they simulated and practiced teaching by teaching each other in their 3rd

year and when they conducted teaching practicums at actual English classes for children in their 4th year. Through these practical activities, the students could convert theory into practice and develop their teaching skills. Moreover, whenever they conducted such an activity, they were provided with an opportunity to review their practice. By reviewing their teaching objectively, they developed, not only their teaching skills, but also their self-monitoring skills, which are considered essential to teachers (e.g., Richards, 2005).

Table 2. Steps the students took when they conducted teaching practices

3 rd year Simulate & practice teaching	4 th year Teaching practicum
1) set goals of the class	1) set goals of the class
2) make a lesson plan	2) make a lesson plan
3) make teaching materials	3) make teaching materials
4) rehearse	4) rehearse
5) simulate and practice teaching by teaching classmates	5) teaching practicum (videotaping the lesson)
6) receive feedback from classmates and the teacher	6) submit a teaching journal
7) submit a review report	7) a meeting to review by observing the video

Evaluation sheet and teaching journal

Table 3 shows the evaluation points from the instructor of this course and the points the students referred to when they wrote teaching journals. After conducting teaching practices, they were always given feedback from their instructor according to these evaluation points, so gradually they seemed to understand what were the points they needed to consider whenever they made lesson plans and did practice teaching.

Table 3. Evaluation sheet and teaching journal

Evaluation sheet from the instructor	Teaching journal
1) structure of the lesson	1) contents of the lesson
2) allotment of time	2) allotment of time
3) contents of the lesson	3) class management
4) class management	4) teaching materials
5) teaching materials	5) views on the lesson

Teaching practicum

The locations where the students conducted classroom observation and teaching practicums were actual English classes for children offered at the Continuing Education Center of the University. Since the instructor of this teacher training course taught these children's classes, it was handy for her to arrange the practicum schedules. There were four children's classes. Each class met every other week, 18 times a year. The following is the breakdown of these classes.

- | | | |
|----|---|-------------|
| 1) | Preschoolers | 6 students |
| 2) | 1 st – 3 rd graders (1) | 10 students |
| 3) | 1 st – 3 rd graders (2) | 10 students |
| 4) | 4 th – 6 th graders | 13 students |

The practicum schedule was carefully organized as in Table 4.

The students taught eight classes in total. Through the practicums, they seemed to not only develop their teaching skills but also to understand the children's characteristics and realize that teaching children is quite different from teaching other generations. It is not always easy for this kind of teacher training course to find a place for conducting practicum. However, since those classes in this report were the ones offered at the university's continuing education center, it was ideal in a sense.

Report book (graduation work)

The students created a report book at the end of the 4th year as their graduation work. Table 5 is the organization of the book they made. The contents show the whole process of their teaching practicum.

Table 4. 2006 practicum schedule**Location: The Continuing Education Center “Hello, Kids!”**

Date	Schedule
June 21	Preparation for the practicum I
June 28	a. make lesson plans and teaching materials
July 5	b. rehearsal
July 12	Teaching Practicum I (1) 1 st – 3 rd graders (10 students) 15:20 ~ 16:05 (2) 4 th – 6 th graders (13 students) 16:15 ~ 17:00
July 19	Teaching Practicum I (3) 1 st – 3 rd graders (10 students) 15:20 ~ 16:05 (4) preschoolers (6 students) 16:15 ~ 17:00
Oct 18	Review meeting
Oct 25	Preparation for the practicum II
Nov 1	a. make lesson plans and teaching materials
Nov 8	b. rehearsal
Nov 22	Teaching Practicum II (5) 1 st – 3 rd graders (10 students) 15:20 ~ 16:05 (6) Preschoolers (6 students) 16:15 ~ 17:00
Nov 29	Teaching Practicum II (7) 1 st – 3 rd graders (10 students) 15:20 ~ 16:05 (8) 4 th – 6 th graders (13 students) 16:15 ~ 17:00
Dec 6 13 20	Review meeting

Table 5. Report book contents

1) Preface	5) Teaching Practicum II
2) Students' profiles	a. 1 st – 3 rd graders class
3) Practicum schedule	b. preschoolers class
4) Teaching Practicum I	c. 1 st – 3 rd graders class
a. 1 st – 3 rd graders class	d. 4 th – 6 th graders class
b. 4 th – 6 th graders class	*Teaching plans
c. 1 st – 3 rd graders class	*Teaching journals
d. preschoolers class	*Video review
*Teaching plans	6) Teaching materials
*Teaching journals	7) Scenes from teaching practicum
*Video review	8) Students' postscripts

This is the book in which the students gathered all of the documents they used and created throughout the year, including teaching plans, materials, journals and so on. By creating this report book, the students could have an opportunity to review what they had done at their teaching practicum. When they completed it, they also seemed to acquire a great sense of accomplishment.

Students' perceptions of the course

Overall, the students perceived this course as quite fulfilling although it required much hard work and sincere devotion. The followings are some excerpts from their comments:

Student A:

At first it was very hard for me to make lesson plans and create classroom activities. I always wondered how I could give a pleasant lesson to children. Concerning my first lesson, I had lots of regrets and wasn't satisfied with anything I did in the class. I'd never imagined how difficult it would be for me to teach English to children. I realized it through actually teaching them. I could not have known it if I had not had a chance to do practicum.

Student B:

Teaching is so difficult. I needed to think about various things... Do the students really understand what I'm teaching? ... Are they bored? ... Are they having fun with my lesson?

Student C:

Through this course, I learned many things. Sometimes I could even go back to the starting point and reexamine my English. These past 2 years were really precious to me. I could not only learn how to teach but also brush up my English.

Student D:

I have learned how to teach English to children for 3 years. Now I'm quite satisfied with what I have done in this course. I could not only learn the theory of teaching English to children but also experience teaching in the actual classes. Experience is quite important.

The students particularly appreciated opportunities for teaching practicums. Although it was temporal, by being in a teaching position within actual classes, they seemed to broaden their perspectives towards English learning and teaching children. The review sessions regularly conducted after practice teaching were also helpful for them to develop and improve their teaching skills.

Future implications

Describing the 3-year course work and presenting the students' perceptions towards the course, this practical report explored the potential of teacher training courses for teaching English to children at the college or university level in Japan. Overall, the students in the report perceived the course as full of opportunities, and although it had some limitations, they were quite satisfied with its programs and what they had achieved through them.

However, there are few colleges and universities that are already providing their students with more professional and sophisticated curriculums, compared to the course in the present report (e.g., Egawa, 2007). Therefore, generalization is not the intention of this report; some implications can be stated for this type of teacher training course at colleges or universities:

1. Incorporating opportunities to conduct teaching practicums into a program is very important. The students in this report really appreciated the opportunities to carry out teaching practicums. They seemed to learn a lot through that experience. Simulating and practicing teaching by teaching peers

- is also helpful for students to develop their teaching skills, but having real opportunities to teach children is irreplaceable.
2. Creating opportunities to review their teaching is quite indispensable for this kind of training course. The review sessions, which were regularly held after practice teaching and practicums, played an important role in this course. In addition, creating a report book was very worthwhile for the students. It was a compilation of their work and activities. Making it really gave them a sense of achievement and a good chance to review their steps.
 3. Currently there is no official license for English teachers of children. This is very problematic for this type of course. Many scholars and school teachers have also pointed out this issue (e.g., Butler, 2005). There is one license called *J-Shine*—however, it is still different from a so-called teachers' license. *J-Shine* is an NPO council which qualifies people to teach English at elementary schools in Japan. However, it does not mean that a person qualified by *J-Shine* can be an official public elementary school teacher. The students in this report also had concerns about whether they could obtain a license or not after they finished the course and wondered if they could become English teachers at elementary schools. Moreover, according to the Ministry of Education, at the elementary level, classroom teachers are the ones who must teach English in their classes. In the case of the students in this report, they were English majors. Therefore, when we establish this kind of course, we need to take this issue into serious consideration.
 4. In order to provide students with more professional knowledge, a course needs to have independent classes on child psychology, child society, and so forth. Since the course in this report had only one instructor, there were some limitations. It was impossible for her to teach all those subjects by herself.
 5. Such a course needs to prepare some opportunities in which students can improve their own English. Most of the students in this report said that they did not recognize their English wasn't strong enough until they actually taught children. Providing some classes on English grammar, pronunciation, and so forth would be really helpful for those student teachers.
 6. It would be better if a course could be involved in the English activities at local elementary schools and so on. In fact, some of the colleges and universities with such teacher training courses have already been involved in those activities and have produced great results.
 7. A course needs to focus on teacher development and teacher training, and students in this kind of course should be highly motivated. In fact, some of the students in this report were not really motivated. They chose the course because they were not interested in other courses. It was sometimes problematic in terms of the commitment.

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