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Abstract

Since April of 2002, a revised course of study known the ‘Period of Integrated Study’ (*Sogoteki na Gakushu no Jikan* in Japanese) has been introduced nationwide in Japanese elementary schools. Under the new guidelines, a range of classroom topics will be introduced as topics students can learn, including ‘International Understanding’ Environment, Welfare, Social Issues, health, information technology etc will be selected. Under the topic ‘International Understanding’ (which includes English communication and the teaching of oral skills) English classes use both native-speaker Assistant Language Teachers of English (ALTs), native Japanese-speaking teachers (JLT’s) and home-room teachers (HRT). For the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (Monbukagakusho) in Japan, one of the main aims of the ‘Period For Integrated Study’, is to enable elementary school students in Japan to develop ‘international understanding, global awareness and a respect and appreciation for foreign cultures’. The goal is to enable Japanese grade-school children, who do not have many opportunities in their daily lives to interact or meet with foreigners and non-Japanese residents, to learn about and understand other cultures, or meet and speak with non- Japanese people and learn about the respective cultures and customs in their countries.

The Period of Integrated Study advocates an ‘experiential approach’ whereby students will be required to ‘identify issues, learn, think, and judge by themselves, to develop better problem-solving skills, engage in problem-solving and investigative activities on their own, deal with problems with a creative attitude and consider their

own ways of living'. The emphasis in the class will be on doing activities that are fun, enjoyable, non-threatening and do not pose an unduly heavy burden on the students. Classes taught by a native speaker ALT will help motivate students to interact and speak with a people from foreign cultures; help them to develop a liking for English; reduce student inhibitions about speaking English, and foster an interest in learning about foreigners and other cultures. The content of lessons will primarily be geared towards the students' daily lives and their personal interests, and content will be set at a level that is consistent with individual levels of ability and aptitude. Emphasis will not be on learning grammar or reading or writing, but on developing communicative speaking skills. It is important that the English classes in elementary schools are enjoyable and fun for students, and relevant to students' daily lives so that they may learn English for communicating with native English speakers. This presentation will give a brief background to the teaching of English in Japan, and present some case-studies of the new curriculum being implemented at this time. Time permitting, I will also discuss some of the problems faced by Japanese teachers (many with poor English speaking skills) charged with teaching the classes and native speakers of English as they set about 'team-teaching' the English classes.

**An Overview of the ‘Period of Integrated Study’:
Teaching English in Japanese Elementary Schools.**

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Introduction.

This paper will examine the development of new curriculum guidelines for schools by the Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture Science and Technology (Monbukagakusho), beginning with a brief introduction to the teaching of English in Japan, and a look at some of the societal and cultural factors that contributed to the Ministry's decision to revise the curriculum in elementary and junior high schools. One of the main aims for the revised curriculum which includes the studying of such subjects as 'Global Understanding' and English, is to cultivate in children a 'zest for living', and for teachers to develop creative and distinctive educational activities. The Ministry Of Education aims to nurture the ability to learn and think independently, establish a fixed basic and fundamental content, and enhance educational activities that encourage individuality. With respect to the teaching of English the course outlines are also detailed in a bilingual Practical Handbook for Elementary English Studies, published by the Education ministry (Monbukagakusho, 2001).

According to the handbook, the Period of Integrated Study also aim to give students the capability to find problems, learn, think and judge for themselves, nurture the qualities and ability to better solve problems, acquire a way to learn and think, foster an independent and creative attitude towards problem-solving and exploratory activities and enable them to reflect upon their own ways of life. In the next section I will outline why the Ministry has been planning these changes that have been pro-actively undertaken since the early 1990's.

English Education Since World War Two.

In this part of the paper, I will identify some of the factors contributing to changes are taking place in the Japanese schools. This will focus on the role of English in the education system and the preparation for university entrance and its 'backwash effect on the instruction methods used in high schools. The study of English in Japan as

shown by the number of examinees every year for the TOEIC test means that the study of English approaches a national obsession. I will background some of the official attitudes towards the teaching and learning of English in Japan. Some of the points listed below may not in themselves be of direct relevance to the new curriculum guidelines or the teaching of English in elementary schools, but all the factors taken together help the reader to understand why these changes in educational policy are taking place at the present time, and how the national mood and popular attitudes are shaping the thinking and planning of the Education ministry. The Ministry's revised guidelines for teaching guidelines are relatively open ended, rather vaguely expressed, including such things as training, teaching materials and class hours are left up to individual teacher interpretation, to be implemented in their classrooms as they see fit and best suiting their individual circumstances. Left unclear or not clearly defined by the Ministry are the features in the guidelines regarding such things as: (a) what the best level or grade is that teachers should begin teaching English conversation (b) how many hours per week is recommended or 'ideal' for each school or group of students, (c) what English teaching curriculum or syllabus are ideally suited for students at each particular grade and level of ability (d) how non-native speaking teachers of English (JTL etc) should be trained in communicative English teaching methodology and techniques, and (e) what kind of administrative and financial support teachers will receive (Kelly, 2002), and (f) how to maximize the benefit of having a non-Japanese native English speaker (AET) in the classroom.

Some of the reasons for the introduction of a new syllabus, which includes the teaching of communicative English in elementary schools will be outlined below. Kelly, (unpublished thesis) lists some of these reasons, such as (a) a severe economic recession that has been hanging over Japan since the burst of the 'bubble' economy in 1990, (b) increasing criticism of the present education system, which has been affected by incidents such as bullying, teenage suicides (c) the increasing rate of social and technological change (d) market forces and the strong interest in speaking and learning English by many Japanese. Kelly goes on to point out a Yomiuri (2000) newspaper article titled 'New Times Force Changes in Education'. According to the article, '...in a world that is becoming increasingly border-less and information-oriented and in light of children's declining academic abilities, the right guidelines are essential to nurture

human resources for the 21st century' (p.3). In Ken Schoolland's (1990) book he reveals 'the dark side of Japanese education, which decries its uniformity, inflexibility and closed nature'. Such problems cited included 'censoring of textbooks, discrimination against Koreans and *burakumin* minorities, 'returnee' children bullied by teachers and peers, adolescents driven to suicide or 'school refusal syndrome' due to exam pressures, relentless 'kyoiku mama' (education mothers) who pushed their children to do well on the entrance exams, and the limited learning options for learning disabled children. A 1995 New York times article claimed that Japanese schools are 'assembly lines that press students into the same shape, likening their atmosphere to that of a military academy.' (Kristof, 1995). Japanese leaders have begun to see Japan's examination-oriented education, which has been in place for the last century, as more part of the problem than the solution, a major barrier to internationalization, and a potential hindrance in meeting the challenges of the new world order (McConnell, 2000; p. 17-18). The dominance of only one foreign language in high schools, compulsory study of English in high school in preparation for university entrance examinations, and heavy emphasis on the rote memorization of vocabulary and discrete grammar, gives students little sense that English is a living language and six years invested in the study of English yields meager returns' (O'Connell, p23).

Japan's lack of internationalisation

Japan's relative social, physical, linguistic and cultural isolation with respect to the rest of the world, Japan's belief in its own cultural uniqueness, the use of a common language among its inhabitants, contribute to a strong sense of separateness from other countries. Japan's arm's-length approach to dealing with its neighbors has to some degree caused Japanese society to appear rather insular, inward-looking and ethnocentric, exceedingly nationalistic, an image that Japan is desperately trying to amend. A largely ethnically homogeneous population leads to a lack of tolerance for outsiders and diversity of thinking, causing international trade disputes, friction and misunderstandings with its close neighbors, in particular America, which have made the Japanese government, business and society in general aware of the fact to do business with countries outside its borders and speaking many different languages, that English communicative skills are in demand, and important for helping to explain Japan and its

culture to the outside world. The teaching of English in Japan is not only used as a means of learning a foreign language but also used as a tool of the Japanese Education Ministry. The English entrance exam and curriculum in its present form serves a kind of sorting mechanism for students entering universities. The grammar-translation teaching methodology is also regarded as a means of instilling 'mental' toughness in students. Hino (1988) and Law (1994) assert that continued utilization of the current teaching methods almost reflect a xenophobic and nationalistic element in the Japanese national character, arguing it is a symbol of Japan's 'refusal of direct engagement' with other languages and its unwillingness to deal with the codes of a foreign culture without recoding them into Japanese (p. 97).

Decline in the academic ability of Japanese students

Another cause for concern for the Education ministry, and an additional problem for many teachers, is the decrease in general academic abilities of Japanese students. A recent article by Mulvey (2001) states that recent studies conducted by the Chuo Kyoiku Shingikai (Central Education Committee) and Monbusho (the previously named Ministry of Education) indicate a sharp decline of English abilities among university entrants (Kelly, in print). According to Maeda (2001), out of 172 countries Japan is 153rd in terms of TOEFL scores, with an average score of 493 (TOEFL Test and score manual supplement: 1994-95 edition). Masayoshi Harasawa (1974) writes 'of all the countries in the world where English has been taught on a nationwide scale, Japan seems to me about the least successful... On balance, our English teaching has become a disastrous failure' (p71-72). In other subjects according to a survey of 5000 first and second year students (mostly in economics departments) one in five students at private universities cannot solve questions on mathematics at the primary school level despite being enrolled in courses that require some knowledge of the subject'. ('University students failing in basic mathematics' (1998). Also of concern to the government, is that internationally Japan's education system is often criticized, and much is made of the fact that Japan has only produced six Nobel laureates in the natural sciences while the United States has produced 179, Britain 67; Germany 61; France 21; and Switzerland 14

(McVeigh, 2002, p.5). In another survey of 601 university students 67.1% said they were studying a subject they did not understand, and among those studying natural sciences at state and local universities 85.1% said they had trouble following the lectures, (McVeigh, p.7). In another article ‘ about 40% of universities modify their curricula for students whose high school education is partially lacking’ and about 30% of 50 universities surveyed conducted remedial classes or supplementary lessons.(“Colleges adapting courses to match students’ needs”, McVeigh, 1997). In another report eighty of ninety-five state university deans reported that academic levels have declined and ‘many cited declining interest in actively getting involved in assignments’ and ‘the poor ability of students to think logically and express their ideas. At some universities students are made to read aloud in class because of poor reading skills in Japanese, let alone English.’ One dean said ‘we can no longer call my school a university education’ (McVeigh, p.7).

The role of university entrance examinations

According to Cummings (1980), the university entrance exam in the last year of high school has not only been a major influence on the curriculum taught at junior and senior high schools in preparation for tertiary study, but is also due to the increased liberal leanings of high school teachers, who have acquired a more liberal outlook and come to ‘identify with the democratic values of equality, participation and individualism. They have conveyed these values to youth in numerous ways, resulting in a profound transformation of the approach young people bring to human relations (p. 156). Because of recent demographic shifts and the declining numbers of 18 year-olds entering universities, it has now become much easier than it once was, for students to enter the university of their choice. In many universities there are more seats than there are students to fill them, and more competition between universities to attract students. In a recent Japan Times newspaper article in Japan statistics show the population of 18 year olds plummeting 1.51 million in 2001 compared with 2.04 million 10 years ago. (Schools Report: “Tuning in to the changing face of higher education”. Japan Times, Oct 2000). By the year 2009 the number of university applicants is set to match university enrolment capacity. (Hani, 2002). Many universities are making entrance requirements easier in order to attract fee-paying students, and those students who take

an entrance examination are almost guaranteed entry in many cases. In Japan once students are accepted into a university, graduation from the school becomes almost automatic regardless of whether or not a student studies while they are there, leading to the notion that university is a 'four-year holiday'. Due to demographic changes in the population resulting in easier entry requirements to universities, there is also more emphasis on developing human qualities among students. Revised government policies concerning high school curriculums are a result of attempts to develop this shift in educational policies. Because of competition for students, ease of graduation from university leads to less emphasis being placed on academic rigor and scholarship. Students have more choices of schools they are able to enter, as schools make every effort to attract students amidst declining numbers of 18 year-olds entering university.

Aims of the Period of Integrated Study:

Because of the problems mentioned above e.g. bullying, declining numbers of 18 year-olds entering university, a gradual decline in students' academic ability, lack of 'internationalism' due to infrequent contact with foreigners, the persistent belief Japanese have in their ability to learn to speak foreign languages, the Monbukagakusho has begun to implement these reforms of the teaching curriculum in elementary schools. According to the Ministry, the 'Period of Integrated Study' in elementary, junior and senior high schools, is an attempt to 'encourage students to use their time to address inter-disciplinary, broad subjects such as 'International Understanding', 'Information Technology', 'the Environment', 'Social Welfare' and 'Health'. (Monbukagakusho, 2001, p.121). Goals for teaching English under the topic 'International Understanding', include the idea that "when conducting foreign language conversation abilities within the studies for International Understanding, activities should incorporate experiential learning? appropriate for elementary school age students? in which children are exposed to foreign language and familiarized with the culture and daily life of foreign countries', (Handbook, p122). Instruction in 'International Understanding' and English are regarded as being complementary to this process of developing social consciousness in two ways: (1) awareness of other cultures helps children to understand their own identity as Japanese people (Monbukagakusho, 2001) and (2) helps them develop a sensitivity towards other cultures (Toyama, 2001).

English Teaching Content.

Listed below are several very important ideas that should be considered when deciding what to teach students using the new guidelines. Actual content is left up to individual teachers, but below I have identified five major areas worthy of consideration by teachers.

(1). **Children need to be interested in the classes, and have classes made interesting for them**

For the students learning English, classes in English communication should aim to be fun or enjoyable, relevant to their daily lives and have classes which focus on speaking and listening skills in English rather than classes which can be considered 'study' or rely on memorization and rote learning. By making the learning of English 'fun' and enjoyable for students it is hoped students will continue to enjoy learning English even after entering junior high school. English classes are best conducted in an enjoyable, positive way with an emphasis on student participation. This may include such activities as sister-city exchanges with overseas cities, exchanges with elementary schools in English-speaking countries and visits to the school by local foreigners. Outside activities like cooking, and field trips are also possible (p. 142). The average class size is 30 students (p. 157), but some have less than 20. Occasionally, some classes might have a few non-Japanese students. In accordance with the Japanese predilection towards allowing children to play, to be free from responsibility and educational pressure, and to generally enjoy life (Bennett, 1998), the Ministry guidelines (2001) clearly specify that teachers should provide English "activities," not English "study." Reading and writing should not be taught, nor should grammar, and the activities should include games, songs, body movement, and other activities that children enjoy. After all, the primary goal is "not the acquisition of language" (p. 164). It is also the responsibility of the teacher to make an effort to tie classroom activities to the students' interests, do things that are of relevance and importance and meaning to their daily lives, and make lessons that are consistent with students' expectations. Studies show young students enjoy speaking English, and are not so inhibited about making mistakes when learning a foreign language.

(2). **The teacher should make sure to let the children take center stage in**

classroom activities, rather than have the teacher run a teacher-centered, top-down approach with knowledge being transmitted from teacher to student.

Activities should focus on speaking activities, games, singing of songs, where students are continually active and stimulated by the classroom activities, while using English. Students are not 'taught' to in a formal way, but while students are engaged in play, using English as the means of communicating.

(3). Students should have the opportunity to come into contact with, and meet non-Japanese people: not only native speakers of English, but also English speaking non-native speakers as well.

Part of the goal is not necessarily for students to become fluent in English, but for them to be exposed to the 'sound' of English as spoken by native speakers, as well as non-native English speakers from other cultures and countries. Students needn't feel frightened, shy or intimidated when approaching or speaking to non-Japanese people or 'gaijin' in Japan, (which has the connotation of 'alien' or 'foreigner'). To encourage the breaking down of linguistic or cultural barriers between Japanese and foreigners, local foreigners living in the community can be invited to the schools to talk about their own culture, sing English songs, or teach simple greetings etc. Internationalization in a mono-cultural and monolingual society such as Japan is not easy to achieve. Japanese bureaucracy and Japanese people due to their history and physical isolation from outsiders have traditionally had rather ambivalent attitudes towards 'internationalization' – a process that would mean opening up the country to different ways of thinking. This would represent a departure from since the Meiji period last century of keeping foreigners, and foreign ideas at 'arm's length' and importing technology and know-how when needed, without adopting western patterns of behavior or customs into Japan. A 1986 survey by the Economic Planning agency found 70% support for what Pyle (1992) calls 'superficial internationalization' but weak support for far reaching measures such as greater numbers of foreign-born employees and marriage to foreigners.

(4). A lack of practical, pedagogical knowledge by teachers concerning effective communicative teaching techniques, lack of background in language acquisition or teaching English as a foreign language, and preferably be able to speak English themselves.

For example, in an article by M. Berthold (1995), he states that pre-requisites

of a good teacher is that the teacher, if not a native speaker of English, should have near native speaking skills, ESL / EFL teaching skills and commitment to and knowledge of teaching. Gabriele Kasper, in a JALT interview (Goddard, 2001), said that if the new English curriculum in Japanese elementary schools is to be more than truly cosmetic, and for both native speakers of English and Japanese teachers to be able to teach communicatively, two essential requirements are needed: (1) teachers themselves are communicatively competent but not necessarily a native speaker of English but have highly developed speaking skills; and (2), a communicative teacher is one who can teach not just according to the textbook. For many teachers, there is a considerable lack of confidence by Japanese teachers in their own English proficiency and subsequently, a lack of confidence in their ability to teach spoken English. When speaking about junior and senior high school teachers, an early paper by Nitobe (1923) states that 'teachers make no secret of their utter incompetence in oral intercourse; it is not expected of them. In fact there is a deplorable propensity to boast of colloquial ignorance'

(5). **Many Japanese teachers have difficulty making effective use of native English speaking AETs in the classroom, or experience difficulties due to language & cultural barriers.**

Teachers need training in order to use non-Japanese assistants effectively. According to one AET in Japan, (Sara), she wrote '... I decide everything. I was not given anything...NOTHING. I was simply told to teach English and make it fun!!! Ha ha! So, I put together some goals regarding what the students could learn (I focused on teaching things around them) and went from there. I did not have any planning time before my job started, I started on a Monday and I was teaching on Wednesday! There are no GOALS from the administration that I know about'. (2002, by email).

'S' responded that some Japanese teachers can speak English but are usually quite modest and downplay their own speaking proficiency. 'About language ability... every single time I meet someone who speaks English quite well I usually tell them so and their response is definitely "No I don't!!!" There are a handful of teachers at the elementary school who speak English quite well...they are able to have a conversation with me although they ONLY do so if I put forth the effort. Japanese people are not ones to "toot their own horn!" These teachers speak English much better than 3/4 of the teachers teaching say they could. The only downfall they have is the lack of courage and the pronunciation ability. Their alphabet is simply linguistically different so it is

necessary to train the mouth'. (email response)

Scheduling of classes with reduced teaching hours

In addition to a lack of suitable and practical training for teachers, the hours of class instruction over the school week have been cut back to fewer days a week, in order to give students more free time to develop outside interests and hobbies. As a result classes previously held on Saturdays have since been stopped altogether. Including classes for the Period of Integrated Study, classes under the new curriculum are now being taught from Monday to Friday, reduced from six days that had been taught until 2001. Teaching hours per year from 2002 are being reduced to 945 hours each year from 1015 hours. In the Period for Integrated Study, allowances have been made for 105 class units at the third and fourth grades, and 110 class units for the fifth and sixth grades as the standard for class hours. In the Period of Integrated study, classes may be made up partially or entirely of classes such as Global Understanding (including English communication classes), or some other subject in the curriculum may be taught some of the time. Kelly (unpublished thesis) writes that: “results from the Monbukagakusho designated pilot schools studies show that most lessons were 45 minutes in length, but 5-minute, 20-25 minute, and 90-minute lessons also were taught (p. 141). At Miyake Elementary School in 2001 for example, the number of hours of instruction for each grade, were as follows.

Grade	1 st year	2 nd year	3 ^d year	4 ^h year	5 th year	6 ^h year
Hours/year	(6)	(12)	29	28	28	29

3rd grade classes and above were classes taught under the Period of Integrated Study. 1st and 2nd (in parentheses) grade English classes were taught at the discretion of the school)

Once a school decides how much time a period will be devoted to teaching English during the year, teachers can assemble a monthly or yearly activity plan. They are given the freedom by the Ministry to develop their own lessons. These will be dependent on individual school preferences as to what teachers decide they feel to be in

students' interest, or what teachers themselves felt they could comfortably manage. The subjects introduced within the Period of Integrated Study are not considered as other purely academic subjects, but a regular and important addition to the basic three pillars of elementary and primary education: the teaching of (a) academic subjects (b) morality and (c) special activities. The curriculum has now been revised to include this fourth categorization called the Period of Integrated Study. The chart below shows this more clearly:

Previous curriculum (before 2000)

Academic Subjects	Morality	Specialactivities
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Present curriculum (as of April 2002)

Academic Subjects	Morality P.I.S.	SpecialActivities
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P.I.S. = *Period of Integrated Study*

Teaching Roles of JLT HRT and AET.

In Japan, classes may be taught either by the Japanese language teacher (JLT), a 'home-room' teacher (HRT), (who was responsible for moral and academic instruction of the students), in addition to a native-speaker Assistant English teacher (AET a.k.a. ALT). The AET involvement and participation in the lesson depends largely on the levels of interest in English shown by the Japanese teacher, their co-operation and participation in the lesson (b) the Japanese teacher's confidence in their own English ability, and willingness and knowledge of how to successfully share and co-ordinate classroom activities, and deal with discipline issues. To a significant degree Japanese teaching staff who have poor speaking or listening skills in English will leave the part of the lesson requiring native-like pronunciation or speaking sections to the native-speaker AET to perform. The HRT or JLT who doesn't speak good English will adopt a more assistant or supervisory role, translating for the AET or making instructions clear to the students etc. Some JLTs may join the students to learning English, translating for the AET where necessary, as well as dealing with disciplinary issues that arose. At

Kasukabe Elementary school the three principles play a collaborative and inter-dependent role depending on the needs and dynamics of the class:

1. HRT, JTE, & AET
2. HRT, AET
3. HRT, AET
4. HRT

HRT = Home Room Teacher & JTE; Japanese Teacher of English (native speaker of Japanese)

AET = Assistant English Teacher (native speaker of English)

The AET is required to provide a native-speaker model of pronunciation, introduce foreign culture and build a foreign or exotic atmosphere for the students. The Japanese teacher of English provides a 'bridge between the homeroom teacher and the AET, maintains discipline in the classroom, and serves a 'stand-in' role for the AET as required. The role of the Japanese home-room teacher is to create the teaching syllabus and materials, make sure the lessons run smoothly, and participate actively in the lesson often taking the role of a student themselves, and create a conducive and enjoyable learning environment.

<<http://www.avcenter.kasukabe.saitama.jp/kasuel/zissenhen4.htm>>

The AET Teacher's Role in the classroom.

Richard Graham and Christy Hamlett-Cook, two teachers with several years experience teaching in elementary schools in the JET program, wrote some web-based articles for teachers, about using AETs in the classroom. They cite examples of other teachers' teaching methods, give advice about effective ways to conduct lessons and effectively use AET teachers working with Japanese teachers in a 'team-teaching' elementary classroom. Christy interviewed some thirty-nine native-speaking assistant language teachers in Gunma, Japan about their experiences teaching in elementary schools. Several factors were considered important in creating an enjoyable atmosphere in the classroom. Some of the most important points are summarized below:

- (a). Avoiding use of '*katakana*' English: (Japanese 'phoneticisation' of English words) to make the words more comprehensible to Japanese students. This is important as it helps students to understand English as it is actually spoken and heard by native speakers, and not simply transformed into 'language' that is easily understood and absorbed by Japanese speakers. Children should be encouraged to speak and learn correct and naturally spoken English, not broken-down or diluted 'Japlish'. Using *katakana* by itself is not 'un-enjoyable' and is easier for the students, but it does not sufficiently create a 'foreign' environment for the children or help them to learn proper English.
- (b). The concentration on listening and speaking of English, with less emphasis on learning grammar rules, memorization, or rote parroting of vocabulary. Subjects such as English that are taught as mandatory subjects to a more or less captive audience during high school, where students are forced to study English more or less unwillingly, in order to pass the entrance exams. Lessons, textbooks and teaching curriculums are minutely prescribed and micro-managed by the Monbukagakusho. Students are 'force-fed' facts and figures and grammar to prepare for the examinations so learning English becomes more difficult and less interesting as children progress into higher grades.
- (c). Introduction to foreign cultures by the AET. This can be quite difficult if the native English speaker has a poor ability in using Japanese, or if the Japanese teacher doesn't speak much English. However the JLT can act as a 'bridge' between the AET and the students when foreign customs etc are being explained.
- (d). One of the important goals is that English should be 'fun' and 'interesting' and that students should like English; they should become accustomed to speaking and hearing English, and practicing pronunciation. If students are forced to memorize vocabulary or learn language above their rate of acquisition or their ability, it is only natural that students will eventually grow to dislike English. (Fujita, 1997). Kitahara (1995) writes that the first term of junior high school is the peak period for students to develop a dislike in studying English. He believes that the main emphasis, in learning a language should be that learning is enjoyable, so students can learn while they 'play' (*asobu*).
- (e). Topics that the students study should also be of interest and familiarity to them, and related to their daily lives. Students should speak English as much as possible

in class, and games and activities should revolve around achieving these ends. One ALT suggested 20% of the class should be used for explanation, and the remaining 80% should be the playing of games. Another said that she makes sure that students speak for 80% of the time, and these demonstrate the value of entertaining, engaging lessons. Visuals promote productive learning, whereby the student recognizes information and is able to produce the information on their own. An example may be the use of flash cards, as they enable the student to immediately respond to visual stimuli and build vocabulary at the same time. Teachers should ensure that the activities they plan for the classes as different classes may respond differently to the same materials e.g. some students will respond enthusiastically while others may be more reserved, freeze up or even brought to tears when called on to respond individually. Teachers must therefore plan accordingly when deciding lessons and content for each class while keeping lessons interesting and fun for the students.

Conclusion

The Period of Integrated Study has been introduced into elementary schools to address a growing number of problems outlined at the beginning of this paper, that are affecting education in Japan today, such a weak economy, falling school rolls and a decline in academic ability by students in Japan. The goal of the Ministry in introducing this new course of study is to allow students to develop skills in creative thinking, independence as well as learning how to become 'global citizen' where students can learn about foreign countries, communicate with foreigners and native speakers of English, and become familiar with spoken English. Because of the 'free hand' they have been given by the Ministry, teachers are free to design their own courses and determine how many hours they will teach as part of the new curriculum, but at the same time in the English classes in particular, teachers are not confident of their English ability and rely on the speaking skills of native speaker AETs. Some hours in the school week have been set aside where children can learn speaking and listening skills, with a class taught either by an AET and a JLT or a HRT. With the reduction in teaching hours during the school week there is more pressure on teachers to teach the same number of classes or more in the remaining hours, and children's schedules become even busier to fill the gap. There will be less emphasis on reading and writing

of English, or on memorizing grammar in the Period of Integrated Study, but on having students simply becoming used to hearing spoken English, and enjoying speaking with a native speaker in a fun and enjoyable atmosphere. There are still many practical problems Japanese teachers face e.g. they lack confidence and adequate skills in teaching oral English, nor have they have received sufficient or adequate pre-service training in English teaching methods.

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<http://www.nier.go.jp/homepage/jouhou/database.html>

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<http://www.av-center.kasukabe.saitama.jp/kasuel/eigoqanda.htm>

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<http://www.hokuriku.ne.jp/miyake-s/kokusai/index.html>

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Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP)

<http://www.childcareuniversity.com/childcare-resource/dap.htm>

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