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Designing a Joint Class for Japanese and Non-Japanese Students

Midori Shimazaki
International Christian University

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Although Japanese and non-Japanese students frequently see each other on campus, they have had little chance to talk seriously about a variety of issues. Many of the Japanese students express their interest in more interaction with non-Japanese students in addition to communication with non-Japanese teachers in the English Language Program. This report explains how joint sessions for Japanese and non-Japanese students were planned and conducted as part of a "Sophomore English" course in order to explore ways to promote interaction among students with various backgrounds. First, the presenter will provide general information on the course and the students. Second, the goal and the actual procedure for the sessions will be presented. Third, student reports about the session will be introduced. Then, the questionnaires will be analyzed to understand the students' feelings and to compare the Japanese students' responses with the non-Japanese students'. Lastly some points to be considered for planning joint sessions will be discussed.

The English Language Program at International Christian University is an integrated EFL program for freshmen and sophomores with a primary emphasis on English for Academic Purposes. First year students take eight to eleven courses per term, and in the second year, they take three courses: English Comprehensive, Theme Writing, and Sophomore English. The Sophomore English course is designed to provide students with further knowledge of and experience in all four language skills in academic contexts. Teachers design their own syllabus for the course, and students are assigned to a certain course based on their preference. The course that the presenter will introduce was called "Current Issues in Asian Countries" and met twice a week for seventy minutes for nine weeks in the winter term. It consisted of 20 students who had finished the freshman component. The goals of the course were (1) to enhance students' understanding of issues in Asian countries, (2) to improve communicative skills such as discussion skills and presentation skills, and (3) to develop vocabulary about Asian issues. The topics focused on were education, discrimination, and aid in Asian countries. A variety of newspaper and magazine articles as well as video segments were used as the basis for analysis, discussion, and oral presentation.

The joint sessions were held twice; one focused on discrimination and the other on aid in Asian countries. The goal of the sessions for the English

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Language Program side was to help students improve communicative skills and learn other people's viewpoints by giving them more opportunities to express themselves, to listen to viewpoints of non-Japanese, and to discuss the issues that they raised in English. A teacher for an advanced Japanese class in the Japanese Language Program and the presenter worked together for the sessions. The students prepared an index card on which important points were written or a full manuscript for a five-minute speech about a topic and made some questions that they could ask their group members about their speech. In class, two or three Japanese students and one or two non-Japanese students formed one group. They had an English session first for about 30 minutes, and the Japanese session for another 30 minutes. In the English session, one of the Japanese students gave a five-minute speech, and the group asked questions and talked about the speech for about ten minutes. The same procedures were followed for the other Japanese students. Japanese was not allowed to use in the English session. After students finished discussing in English, they switched their language to Japanese. In the session one of the non-Japanese students gave a speech about the same topic and the group subsequently had a discussion on the speech. The other non-Japanese students made a speech in the same way, and the group talked about it. The students were asked to fill in the questionnaire at the end of the class and were informed that further discussion over lunch could be held at a reserved place on campus. The homework for the Japanese students was to write a two-page report on the discussion in the English session. The teachers' roles were to correct and comment on the students' cards and manuscripts prior to the sessions, to listen to each group in the sessions, and to comment on the students' reports.

The Japanese students' reports described not only major points but also detailed interactions. Analyzing the reports provided the teachers with abundant information about how students interacted with each other. The questionnaires indicated that most of the Japanese and non-Japanese students enjoyed the sessions and that they regarded the sessions as learning experiences, that is, learning something about the target language, the topics, and effective ways to make a speech and have discussion. It appears that the Japanese students were more anxious about their skills prior to the sessions and more modest about their performance after them.

Based on the data from the joint sessions, more exploration and discussion may help teachers design successful joint sessions.