

# An Activity-Focused English Course for College Students

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## Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to present our challenge to create “English in Action,” an activity-focused English course for Japanese college students. Traditionally, the initiative of classes has been taken mostly by teachers in Japan. Students have been considered as those who should be instructed and follow the directions in a passive manner. It is, therefore, not surprising to find out that Japanese students keep silence even when they are required to express themselves in public whether in their native tongue or in foreign languages. However, it should be noted that, given a chance to take the initiative and responsibility with appropriate encouragement, Japanese students demonstrate a remarkably positive attitude toward the acquisition of the target language. It is often observed that they start to speak out when their fear for making mistakes and getting penalty is taken away. “English in Action” is a course to provide Japanese college students with the chance to express themselves and to communicate with others on the topics of their own interest in English through their activities. The course has actually been developed at Department of English Language and Literature of Toyo Women’s College under the collaboration of English native speakers and Japanese teachers, and has proven effective for Japanese students. Describing the course in outline below, we will introduce its brief history, several aspects of students’ activities, coordination of team-teaching, and evaluation of students, and we will conclude the paper by presenting the tasks which are required for further development of the course.

“English in Action” is one of the recent *inventions* in our latest curriculum at Toyo Women’s College, started in 1994. In Department of English Language and Literature, there are three categories of subjects from which students must take courses to fulfill the requirements for graduation. “English in Action” belongs to the second category which is entitled “Major Subjects,” and more precisely, to Group A of that category. Group A is settled mainly for the students of Practical English Course and it includes classes to provide students with the chance to practice their skills of English language through several kinds of actual activities<sup>(1)</sup>; whereas in the first category entitled “Basic Subjects,” students learn the fundamental knowledge of English as well as that of French and Japanese, and in the third “Related Subjects,” they take courses from wider range of academic fields other than English language. “English in Action” is an elective course for the first year students, and is a subject based on team-teaching of an English native

speaker and a Japanese. The two instructors organize the program of the course together and discuss its procedure closely, but they conduct each class independently in principle. Students attend two classes a week; once with the native speaker and once with the Japanese. Thus they approach certain topics with the assistance of two different instructors with different cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Students are to be evaluated by the team and get 4 credit units when they satisfactorily complete the course.

### 1. A Brief History of “English in Action”

In 1992 the planning of the new curriculum started at Toyo Women’s College. Induced by the new rules issued from Ministry of Education to regulate the academic standard of colleges and universities, most of the institutions of higher education in Japan were urged to reconsider their current curricula<sup>(2)</sup>. The main purpose of the reconsideration in Toyo Women’s College particularly was, on the one hand, to get ourselves prepared to the coming era when there would be a larger demand from the society for human resources with practical skills of English language in the global frame of mind, and, on the other, to preserve our tradition of academic English education through literature and linguistics. The recent policy of Ministry of Education has eliminated the former obligation for the students to take at least three subjects from the three major academic fields (Liberal Sciences, Social Sciences, and Natural Sciences) and two foreign languages for general education, and has given individual institutions the liberty and the flexibility to settle their own requirements. We took, therefore, to the renovation of the curriculum, paying special attention to the subjects to develop students’ practical skills of English.

At the English Teachers’ Meeting, which is a branch of our Faculty Meeting, we decided to start four working groups under the following titles to develop the new curriculum: 1) Practical English Skills—to consider the reasonable unification of the classes previously known as “English Grammar” and “English Composition” ; 2) Intensive English—to consider the classes which would provide students with larger chance to engage in spoken English by means of team-teaching; 3) English Qualifications—to consider the classes to prepare for variety of qualification tests 4) Writing and Speech—to consider the classes to aim the improvement of students’ skills for public speaking in English. “*Ur-English in Action*” belonged to the second group. The first idea of the class was to give students more intensive English education through team-teaching (of a native English speaker and a Japanese) than other courses; however, it soon turned out that to meet twice (not once) a week under one course title could hardly be called “intensive.”<sup>(3)</sup> While the naming of the class was in suspension, it was decided that a pilot class should start within the framework of the existing curriculum.

Accordingly, a native English speaker (Claude Arnaud) who was teaching English Conversation and a Japanese (Kitada, the author of the present paper) who was teaching English Reading agreed to make a team. It was arranged that they should teach the same

class on different days of a week in 1993. There was a slight unbalance of the number of students for each, however, the coordination began. As our traditional rule, the number of students in a conversation class by an English native speaker must be a half of that of a reading class by a Japanese teacher: e.g., if it is 23 for the former, then 46 for the latter. Precisely, Arnaud was to teach one half of the class which Kitada taught. In order to start the pilot class, the minimum issues of agreement between the two teachers were made as follows:

1. To use English as a classroom language.
2. To make students aware of the social and global issues.
3. To encourage students to participate in various activities conducted in English.
4. To focus more on fluency than accuracy of students' speaking skills.
5. To understand the role of teachers not as lecturers but as facilitators.
6. To keep and share a log-book for mutual understanding and the exchange of information/ideas of the class.

We made it a rule to respect the independence of individual classes and at the same time to keep a close contact to each other so that we can investigate into the methodology for conducting the course.

The students of a second year class (2N) were chosen to make a pilot class. Arnaud's conversation class and Kitada's reading class were basically different obligatory courses; therefore, there was no presupposed motivation at first on the part of the students to participate in an activity-focused, intensive English course under team-teaching. Nonetheless, most of the participants demonstrated evident curiosity and eagerness to meet two different types of teachers in a close relationship. "A team of teachers" was something they had not expected before. (Even for those who had experienced team-teaching at the junior high school level, this kind of team was different.) Also the idea of having the liberty of making mistakes in class without any strict checking was a new sensation to them.

The reality of the class was, however, full of confusion. Not only to students but also to the Japanese teacher, the agreement above was demanding to accomplish. First, to conduct the class in English should be justified idealistically but not all the participants were eager to do so, especially when there were as many as 46 in a class. To restrict the usage of Japanese in class was not an easy task. Second, it was an initial difficulty to facilitate the class; for the author was not accustomed to the unquiet class with students having discussion in groups here and there, or pairs in conversation away from her control, and more than anything else it was hard to evaluate the performance of students in spoken English. Each class-time was an encounter with a new phase of the activity-focused English course. It was hard for her to grasp such a dynamic class because she had been accustomed to static classes where students were closely bound to

textbooks and audio/visual tapes at least. Moreover, to get students be aware of social and global issues meant that the teacher herself should always maintain a well-balanced sense to inspire them. We have to admit clearly that there was a gap between the initial intention of teachers and the actual aspiration of students; for instance, in the case when we saw a video concerning an environmental issue, discussion was planned after the video show but it had little impact on students' mind. Actually, few could understand its English narration only with insufficient preparation in advance. The video only caused confusion in class. It was found out that, when there was no support of Japanese translation in class, teaching materials should be selected with full care not to produce the barrier for communication. We learned from the experience that the procedure of activities should have been always well-knit, and that for that purpose teaching plan and strategy were needed much more for this class than for other independent classes. It was evidently significant to have a pilot class started.

These difficulties may not be very serious to the specialists of Teaching English as a Foreign Language. But they were to the author who majored in English literature (not even linguistics nor education) during her undergraduate and graduate period. Arnaud insisted, however, that taking "the English only" discipline as one of the basic rules of the class was to demonstrate students the fact that English is one of the common languages for international communication, and so there can be variety of accents and deliveries with local flavors including Japanese one. According to Arnaud, a Japanese teacher should play a role-model who speaks English in an English class no matter how different her/his speech manner may be from native English speakers. Another reasoning for the discipline was to give students more chance to speak English by themselves than they do in classes conducted in Japanese or even in regular English conversation classes, where participants are supposed to face a teacher, having only a few times of chance for speaking. Therefore, it was a totally different area of education for the author to start a pilot class.

Students expressed the merits of the pilot class at the end of the second semester as follows:

1. We feel our listening skills have improved by having two classes a week.
2. We enjoyed the discussions.
3. We found some topics difficult but enjoyed hearing views of others.
4. We had plenty of "Speaking time."

"Topics" mentioned above included environmental issues, gender roles, unemployment and so on.

It was clear that students found the class interesting and that there was the need for this type of class. Several months later, at the English Teachers' Meeting, we discussed again the characterization of this "intensive class." The naming of the class was not

totally supported but some new ones were suggested by a number of teachers; one of which was “English in Action;” for the basic concept of the class was found to be the activities of students. Through such activities as pair-works, group discussion, debate, presentation, role-plays, and performance conducted in English, students were expected to improve their speaking skills. Although Arnaud herself insisted that the class should be called “Discussion on Issues,” Japanese faculty members including the author preferred “English in Action” from the point of view that the aim of the class was not solely to let students participate in discussion but to encourage them for various comprehensive activities<sup>(4)</sup>.

In 1994, “English in Action” was included in the new curriculum as an elective course for the first year students of the Practical English Course of Department of English Language and Literature. Arnaud and the author made the first formal team then. This time they were to teach exactly the same number of students in a class. In 1995, Greg O’Dowd and Junichi Matsumoto made another team.<sup>(5)</sup> After Arnaud’s departure in 1996, Diane Hadden-Kokubun and Kitada made a new team and O’Dowd also made a new team with Takayuki Takao. (Three teams are planned in 1997.) Since 1994, the number of participants to “English in Action” has been limited to 25 at the maximum. In Arnaud-Kitada team and Hadden-Kitada team, we have made it a custom to give an interview test to select the participants. Students are required to have reasonable listening and speaking skills beside the clear motivation to attend this activity-focused course.

## 2. Several Aspects of Activities in “English in Action”

### 2.1. The Definition of “Activities”

When we discuss “Students’ activities in class,” we can hardly start without making it clear: what they actually mean. In classes of any kind at collegiate level, there should necessarily be certain kinds of intellectual activities on the part of students as well as on the instructors’ part. However, there is a tendency that only a part of students among the whole attendants are active, while the rest is just listening in a passive manner. The result is often that the majority of students in classes look quite inactive as silent observers of what is going on. They seldom show their activities if they have any inside. Students do not have abundant opportunity to demonstrate their activities except at a few times of examinations in usual courses. In “English in Action,” we encourage all the participants to make use of the class-time, practicing their speaking skill. In order to clarify our purpose in our class, we define “Students’ activities in class ” as follows:

1. Among the four skills of English (listening, speaking, reading, writing), speaking is the main target of this class; therefore, any preparatory practice leading to speaking is considered the significant “activity” here.

2. Speaking practice among students by themselves is the basic activity.
3. There are several patterns of practice in class such as pair work, group discussion, interview, presentation, performance, role-play, debate, games, singing (with physical expression), etc. They are all regarded “activities” .
4. Students’ activities outside the classroom vary from interview, visiting, research, watching videos, reading materials, etc., which will get some feedback in class later.

Thus, we call anything students do “activities” . The point is in the fact that we positively recognize whatever students do as the starting point of the class. We the instructors are there to help students go on acting, playing the main roles of the class. Therefore, we try to make students understand that they are most welcome to ask questions in class and ask for help whenever they have difficulties. To eliminate their hesitation to express themselves is the major work for the facilitators at the beginning. When students know that facilitators are available to help them anytime, they get relaxed and feel more comfortable for speaking.

One of the strategies that the author takes to make students’ activities as evident as possible is to let students clear most of the desks and chairs from the usual position, and put them along the walls of the classroom in order to make an open space in the middle of the classroom. In the open space, students can move around, form groups, rearrange them, and show themselves to the rest of the classmates without the (desk/chair) barriers. When they want to sit down and start the discussion in groups, they bring desks and chairs to the spots they want to settle down. If they need the teacher’s help, it is not difficult for them to get her attention and call her to their groups in that formation. The easy “footwork” in the classroom is found to be relevant to the free activities. It is true that the class looks chaotic sometimes with the physically active students, but we regard it as a process toward a productive goal. It is amazing that students intensively listen to others when they recognize that their activity (whether it is a presentation, a brief speech, or a role-play) is really meaningful. The clear contrast between the busy state of students in “English in Action” and the quiet one in the traditional chalk-and-talk style classes is worth mentioning. Interaction and involvement of the participants are the main characteristics in the former: students’ activities make the class.

## 2.2. The Syllabus of “English in Action”

As mentioned above, there are two teams of “English in Action” at present, and so there are two different syllabi. Two teams are independently conducting the course. The only agreement we make is to have a same textbook: *Speak Up—Conversation for Cross Cultural Communication* (Longman Asia Limited 1993), but it does not mean we always use this in class. The textbook is used only in a supportive way, e.g., in Hadden-Kitada team. By experience we think it may deprive students of their initiative if we simply follow the contents of a textbook. We use it only occasionally to refer to some useful

topics, expressions and vocabulary. The merit of having one textbook in common is that it can be used to change the topics of the class. When we consider it necessary for students to learn “accurate” expressions, the textbook gives them a good guideline. The audio-tape attached to the textbook demonstrates the natural flow of English accents, which is an important stimulation to students when they are with the Japanese teacher. We scarcely spend time repeating the model speech, following the tape, as we often do in other classes. The basic attitude of the teachers of the author’s team has been that we dare not demand the correctness (or rather the similarity to the native speakers’ accents and/or delivery) to the students so much as we demand their own opinions. To those who may question and are dubious about the intelligibility of students’ speech, we should point out that when they have the contents to express, they are able to make themselves understood no matter how poor their grammar may be. Therefore, we use the textbook for students’ support, not for the object to master.

We (Hadden and Kitada) write in our syllabus of “English in Action” for 1996 that the aim of this course is “to give students the opportunity to be aware of current issues, to develop their critical thinking, and to improve their English expression.” As is indicated there, we expect students to realize that they are living in the dynamic world as young citizens and to acquire the positive attitude to express their own ideas about various issues in their own words in English. Our announcement on the “aim” intentionally emphasizes that the students’s awareness and thought should come first; and then comes English language. We have no intention to instruct useful English expressions for daily conversation as the main purpose of the class but, on the contrary, we want students to have initiative of their own first of all.

Moreover, we include the following message in our syllabus: “We are planning to go out of the classroom for research and field work at least once every semester and also to invite a guest speaker to our class. Students are expected to prepare and conduct these events by themselves. *Your action and contribution will make our class successful.*” Thus, those who apply to “English in Action” in 1996 should be well prepared to engage in activities from the very beginning. 52 applicants came to the interview for selection and 25 were admitted (one dropped out in midterm). The class schedule for the first semester of 1996 includes “Leadership Topics” for four weeks as one of the most outstanding activities of this course. (In the second semester we have “Video Interview Project” for four weeks, following the several times of preparatory classes in precedence.)

The reason for including “Leadership Topics” along with other ones is that we consider it as one of the most important and necessary factors for Japanese collegiate students that they should acquire leadership, initiative and responsibility through studying English. It happens quite often that, when Japanese students go abroad to study English, they become at a loss among other foreign students who are far more talkative and outgoing than they are in class in spite of the fact that Japanese students are not

inferior to them regarding the amount of grammatical knowledge and vocabulary. Not only their classmates but also teachers of English schools and/or courses attached to colleges and universities tend to underestimate the potentiality of Japanese students. They may be slighted only because they hesitate to speak out. Japanese students lack the training to integrate their thought and knowledge in English into the way that others could understand. If diligence and obedience are highly evaluated in Japanese society including schools, they are not so especially in English speaking societies. And unfortunately, Japanese students seldom have the opportunity to acquire the explicit manners of speech as long as they stay inside their native country. Even English classes traditionally have not offered them the opportunity to learn the positive attitudes in verbal self-expressions. In 1996 semesters, Hadden-Kitada team regards “Leadership Topics” (and “Video Interview Project” ) as the cores of their “English in Action” course.

### 2.3. On “Leadership Topics”

It is not that Arnaud-Kitada team was not interested in students’ activities outside classroom but Hadden-Kitada team pays more attention to activities based on their own initiative which may be extended to the outer world. Within a limited period of time, students may demonstrate what they think of certain issues if not in sophisticated manners; however, as long as the issues and the styles of talking are something they are demanded to take up by teachers’ suggestions, they are still strongly controlled by others, and thus, they remain dependent. When it occurred to us that we should respect students’ “autonomous” activities in a more positive way to sustain their creativity, we thought we should leave the whole class-time to them. We also thought that the sooner, the better. In fact, the idea was like this:

1. A group of students will be the leaders of a class one day and be in charge of the whole activities of the day.
2. They are not expected to give a demonstration or a performance to show to the class but they are responsible for making the class active, indicating topics and activities to participate in.
3. They should make an announcement on their plans of “topics” and “activities” prior to the class and let them prepare for it.
4. They are allowed to take the class out of campus if necessary during the class-time.
5. They are supposed to sum up the activities of the day at the end of the class or at the beginning of the next class to get the feedback from other participants.
6. They would be evaluated by the quality of their leadership: in other words, how much they succeed in making the class active as well as how the contents of the activities are meaningful.

25 students were divided into 8 groups, with 3 (or 4) members in a group. Because there are two classes a week, one with Hadden and one with Kitada, four weeks were to be spent for “Leadership Topics” as a whole.

We gave students the guideline of possible topics and activities (or tasks) as well as the model “lesson format” for their support. In our original planning, the list includes the following:

Task (activity): This is the task the class will do. No more than 2 groups per task. (Choose one.)

survey. . . . .

debate. . . . .

interview guest. . . . .

make something. . . . .

planning. . . . .

visiting. . . . .

other. . . . .

Topic: No more than one group per topic.

abortion, AIDS, art, books and magazines, bullying, children’s rights, child abuse/corporal punishment, computers, criminals & the law, cooking, dancing, diet, divorce, environment, family names, fashion, health, holiday, jobs, marriage, movie, music, new style of language learning, royal family, students’ part time jobs, suicide, teenager and sex, urgent political issues, volunteer work, women’s junior college, other. . .

Lesson Format:

Preparation homework may be given in the previous class.

(Timing) (Format)

15 mins Introduce Topic

55 mins Explain and Do Task

10 mins Summary by Group

10 mins Class Feedback

Teacher’s Comment

Homework or Brief Introduction by the Next Group

We distributed the handouts of the detailed explanation of tasks, topics, and lesson format, in addition to the oral guidance which was given at the beginning of the course in the respective classes. During that period of time, our “ordinary” activity-focused classes were going on and they also gave students the living examples of what they were expected to do, playing the role of teachers (leaders) by themselves. Hadden and Kitada

had made an agreement to follow a common procedure of each class: starting with “warm up activity” and go on to “stimulation and information,” and “activities of the day,” which would be followed up by “personal perspectives,” and “preparation for the coming classes.” Students had more than one month before actually starting the “Leadership Topics” on the third week of May, 1996.

“Leadership Topics” were scheduled as follows:

<p>Monday (Hadden)</p> <p>Group 1 5/20 “Family Names” Interview of Ms. Hadden and Group Discussion</p> <p>Group 3 5/27 “Divorce” Video-watching of <i>Klamer</i> <i>vs. Klamer</i>, and Role-plays in Groups</p> <p>Group 5 6/3 “Cancer and Hospice” Video-watching of the Topic and Interview to Ms. Kitada as a Patient’s Family</p> <p>Group 7 6/10 “To Fight Against Natural Disasters” Introduction of “Bosai Center,” and Quiz about Self-protection</p>	<p>Tuesday (Kitada)</p> <p>Group 2 5/21 “AIDS” Visit to AIDS Information Center in Ikebukuro</p> <p>Group 4 5/28 “Marriage” Visit to a Wedding Hall, Tokyo Garden Palace, and Interview of its Staff</p> <p>Group 6 6/4 “Raising Children” Visit to a Kindergarten, and Interview of Teachers on Infants’ Education</p> <p>Group 8 6/11 “Computer” Class in the Computer Room, Play Games, Read Hyper Texts, and Group Discussion on Computer-assisted Language Class</p>
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Such were the plans that students made. Some were successfully delivered in class and others were not so well done. Let us give a more specific investigation into some examples, pointing out the merits and demerits of this experimental project.

Students were totally free to choose topics and tasks (activities) on their own. They were encouraged to ask teachers for advice and suggestions in advance: therefore, some groups came to Kitada’s office and discussed their plans with her, and other groups just went out of campus for information by themselves. We have to admit clearly that during the time of preparation, students were certainly not restricted with the “English only” principle. When they talked to the author outside the classroom, they spoke in Japanese. Also when they took the class out of campus to visit some institutions during the

“Leadership Topics Week,” they no doubt conducted the class in Japanese. We admitted the usage of Japanese on those occasions because the purpose of this project was first of all to foster students’ initiative and responsibility; we believe that language would follow only if they can make full use of the chance to increase experience and collect information by themselves. However, in classroom “English only” principle was strictly maintained. When some students started to speak Japanese because of the complicated contents of their report, they were immediately told to switch their language into English.

Among the three groups which took up “visiting” as their task, Group 2 did the best job in that it successfully organized the lecture of a medical doctor of the AIDS Information Center and the interaction between its staff and participants, after several preparatory visits to the Center in advance on their own. The topic of “AIDS” itself made a great impact to their classmates, making them aware of the problems related to AIDS, arousing their direct interest towards the disease, and giving actual and useful information about the facts of AIDS. Except the introductory announcement at the beginning, all the activities in the Center was delivered in Japanese; however, they summarized the activities in English at the next class. The visit made us feel the possibility that a college English class can be extended to the activities which have some actual connection with the society. Thus, students can obtain the confidence that what they are doing in class is not limited within the textbooks or classrooms; they realize that they are living in today’s world where their awareness of issues can even save their own life and that they can utilize English for collecting information and communicating with people in the world. In fact, in AIDS Information Center, we faced the fact that actions against AIDS are much more active abroad, especially in the United States, than in Japan although Japan is by no means free from the spreading of the disease. By acquiring the basic knowledge of the disease, students are prepared to talk about it in English when they are required to do so. Without the information, there is no way for them to say anything about AIDS either in Japanese or in English. (We should remember that in Japanese schools, students have little chance to go out of school buildings for research or “field-work.” )

Both of the “Interviews” of Group 1 and Group 5 should get special mention, for they spent time enough to prepare for the class, talking to the guest speakers (this time they were Hadden and Kitada) several times in advance, reading reference books, and collecting interesting materials for the classmates. Topics were both serious and so they aroused quite a vivid reaction in participants. As for “Family Names,” Hadden (officially Hadden-Kokubun) talked of her own experience as a person who decided to maintain both Canadian and Japanese family names in her international marriage, and of the contradictions that she has met in terms of Japanese law, especially in “family registration system.” The leaders had let participants prepare questions in advance in English, which enabled them to start interaction between the speaker and the listeners

quite smoothly after the first talk by the former. As for "Cancer and Hospice," Kitada talked of the process which her father took from the discovery of lung cancer to his death in a hospice. She described how her family were confronted with their father's illness and how they made the choice of putting him not in a hospital, but in a hospice. She explained the difference between these two institutions. Throughout her talk, uneasy concepts like "the informed consent" or "the quality of life" as the essential human rights were repeatedly emphasized. In spite that the topic seemed far from the present interest of young participants of the class, they were so intensively listening to the speaker. Hadden analyzes that when students listen to someone with full understanding and strong sympathy (or even antipathy) regarding its contents, they may forget which language they are listening to; English or Japanese. One of the students later confided to Kitada that she was surprised to find herself so involved in the talk in English. Hadden says "listening for purpose" is not a passive activity. Questions and answers between the speaker and the listeners after the talk were lively. In both cases, teachers of this class were "utilized" by students as "guest speakers" and what they talked was not for lectures: the difference is that students activated on them and drew out the talks from them. We call it "students' activity"

Another good example was "Computer" by Group 8. In Toyo Women's College, we have two computer classrooms equipped with 46 client machines for each which are wired to the server machine under the system of LAN (local area network). The Media Center helps students with computer related matters. Group 8 visited the computer room several times and asked the engineers of the Center for their advice prior to their class. The leaders mastered how to use the fundamental system and made up a plan to make use of the network efficiently for "English in Action." They started with games. Most of the students had played video games before but they were all beginners in the usage of personal computer. The leaders explained in English how to play a shooting game. Students in horizontal rows made teams and fought for the prize. Next, a CD-ROM of Beatrix Potter's *The Story of Peter Rabbit* was passed to every participant. Leaders showed through the monitor TV how to start it, what kind of functions the CD-ROM contains, and what everybody can do by clicking the mouse, announcing through microphone in English. Participants were allowed to "read" and "listen to" the digital book as much as they like in their own ways for 30 minutes. Then the leaders told them to talk in groups about what kind of possibility a computer classroom has for English education. One representative from each group stood up to talk of her opinion in English lastly. According to the representatives, without exception, they are interested in using the personal computer. They say their curiosity urges them to learn how to use it. It was found out that students' expectation to computer-assisted language learning is very high. As an observer and assistant of the day, the author saw all the students in the class busily engaged in activities related to computer throughout the class-time in a productive way, and she was convinced that students learn English and computer literacy

at the same time if there exists a proper leadership. Student leaders were not perfect, of course, but their effort led the class to action truly.

We have, however, unsuccessful examples as well. Group 7 collected information regarding "Protection against Disasters," yet it was evident that they could not focus on their topic with real interest. Moreover, they did not spend sufficient time for preparation. The result was that they could not present the topic in an attractive way nor involve their classmates in the planned activities very well. Their major mistake was that none of the members of the group demonstrated the real initiative or responsibility. They were dependent on each other and thus totally inactive. The class was disappointed with them and wasted almost the whole class-time in silence. Through the unsatisfactory experience the leaders learned that there was nobody to help them when they were in charge of the class. It was also clear to all the participants that unless they have the positive attitude toward the study of English, they would learn nothing. It was difficult on the part of teachers not to help students in their difficulty but we could not compromise: they should learn through their own failure. Another example: Group 6 took the class to visit Bunkyo Nursery School, a private kindergarten not far from our campus. The arrangement of the visit was well made and we were received cordially. However, there was very little real interaction between the two parties. In spite of the highly educational lecture that the director of the kindergarten gave them, participants were not so responsive. Only one of the leaders was busily working to make the visit fruitful. She was the only person who had a personal motivation (she had a five year old step-brother at home). For others children were out of their true interest. Unfortunately no remarkable impact was given to the class. It became clear that going out of campus does not necessarily result in productive activities: during the visit, there was no room for using English nor obtaining special experience. We were not allowed to observe the infants' English class at the kindergarten. The director pointed out that the existence of many outsiders would disturb children and that their limited lesson time should never be spoiled. Activities outside campus are not easy.

The project of "Leadership Topics" thus indicates us several fundamental points that we should take into consideration: 1. When students have the real motivation of their own, they perform creative activities; 2. If students are sure of their purpose, they listen to English intensively and speak out in their words; 3. Students often tend to get more impact from their classmates than from teachers; 4. Information and experience out of campus can be good stimulation for students' acquisition of actual knowledge and ideas; 5. Leadership and responsibility are something that students should make efforts to acquire. Students have found out that it is much more interesting to take initiative in class than just to follow the direction of teachers. Now that the students are aware of their own capabilities, teachers' tasks are greater because they would never be satisfied with classes where there is no room for their activities.

After the experience of "Leadership Topics" in the first semester, "Video

Interview Project” is planned for the second semester, in which students are required to decide all the details of their interviews in groups, video shooting/editing, and class management. The target people of their interviews should be English speakers in this project. Students go on to the next stage of their activities.

### 3. Coordination of Team-Teaching

Since the time of the pilot class that Arnaud-Kitada team started, coordination of the two teachers was one of the most energy/time-consuming yet significant and rewarding aspects of “English in Action;” for the course would easily be turned into a mere combination of two irrelevant oral English classes without it. “English in Action” demands both the native English speaker and the Japanese to contribute equally to “maintain” and “develop” the class. If it were not for the interactive collaboration between the two teachers, “English in Action” would lose the best part of its novelty and attraction that students have been appreciating so far. The difference of their cultural backgrounds, as well as the sense of value that they share in common, enables students to engage in their activities with a fairly well-balanced condition. We should examine, therefore, the reality of collaboration further in details.

When we think of team-teaching in Japan, the most common style of it is the one widely applied in public junior high and high schools, where a native English speaker is considered as an ALT (Assistant Language Teacher) working together with the Japanese main teacher in one classroom. Even when ALT teaches a class alone, he/she is in most cases a special guest to demonstrate the “real English” and give Japanese students the chance to “practice” what they learned from textbooks before. Assistant Language Teachers are employed by municipal governments and are visiting plural schools of the district periodically. If there is certain coordination at all between Japanese teachers and ALT, classes are evidently under the strong control of the former.<sup>(6)</sup>

For “English in Action” a native English speaker and a Japanese teacher work on completely an equal basis: we plan the program of the year, write the syllabus, select the applicants, share a log-book, readjust the original plans occasionally, exchange the information of the participants and their activities, evaluate students, make students surveys and so on together. Especially before new semesters begin, we discuss the plan spending hours. We can hardly avoid the precise disputation when we talk of the topics we should take up and how to arrange them. We ask the curriculum office to place the two classes of “English in Action” on different days and also to arrange our schedule so that we can share at least one day in a week to ensure time for coordination. Because Arnaud was one of the special lecturers who work mainly for Toyo Women’s College, teaching nine classes there, three days a week, the team had sufficient occasion for coordination; however, Hadden works part-time at TWC, teaching two classes, one day a week; therefore, we don’t have much time for complicated discussion during the semester. As a result, we let each other participate in each other’s class when we have

time; thus, on several occasions during “Leadership Topics” (and “Video Interview Project” ) there were both Hadden and Kitada in a class together, not in the way as a main teacher and an assistant but as two equal facilitators. In addition to the log-book, we exchange messages by telephone, fax, and e-mail if necessary. When one of the two wants to give students hand-outs in advance, the other does it with the partner’s message. In order to make the activity-focused English course by team-teaching successful, the close contact between the two teachers is indispensable; in other words, teachers are required to be constantly and highly cooperative.

The difference of cultural backgrounds and mother tongues of the two teachers makes the coordination sometimes difficult. For instance, while the team of Arnaud and Kitada was going on, the former was sometimes very critical to the latter. Arnaud criticized Kitada for not being creative and energetic enough to support students’ activities. Arnaud’s standard mainly came from her teaching experience in Australia where she was collaborating classes with her colleagues on daily basis through discussions and meetings. However, as the collaboration of a course is not so commonly done in a Japanese college, Kitada did not efficiently express her contribution and thus seemed not very inspiring nor stimulating to Arnaud as a partner of the team especially during the second semester of 1993. Arnaud even declared the possibility of quitting the team. Kitada then found it necessary for a collaborator to maintain the high tension for the team-work with a native English speaker. Coordination between the two teachers, therefore, is the key to the success/failure of a students’ activity-focused course by team-teaching. It can also be stated that full communication between the partners of the team makes the class rewarding.

We anticipate a question if team-teaching is really worthy of such a painstaking coordination. We should answer as follows: first, both can get benefit in that the Japanese teacher gets the chance to reconsider Japanese habits of life from different points of view, and the non-Japanese teacher may possibly have the chance to find Japanese sense of value on various occasions; second, through the coordination, teaching materials and topics should be refined and selected well; third, students get the feeling that they are attending two different yet closely related classes from what two teachers refer to each other. The tension and understanding between the two teachers give the class an ever-stimulating flavor. Besides, the different perspectives of the two teachers about students and education may produce, when they are wisely coordinated, quite a dynamic change in an English class of the Japanese college scene: liberation from the text/grammar-bound silence. Here arises the demand for contents and manners of communication. An English class can be transformed into a place for activities. Two teachers are there to support in their own ways the realization of students’ activities.

#### 4. Evaluation of Students

In “English in Action” students are evaluated by their speaking skills, instead of

written tests. In order to demonstrate their speaking skills, students have to be well prepared. Preparation includes their daily participation in classroom activities, their positive contribution to various practical activities in and outside classroom, and their individual (personal) experience of reading, writing, watching TV news and/or videos/movies, and talking with others. Students have to make efforts to enrich their vocabulary, polish their pronunciation and articulation, and study the contents of their activities. In class, we do not practice each qualification mentioned above one by one, but teachers are constantly watching the condition of students' ability for communication. As there are only 25 participants, individuals are easily recognized and teachers' daily checking is not very difficult. Hadden gives students writing assignments occasionally with handouts which are to be used in class to make them familiar with topics in advance. She takes the result of the assignments in account to her final evaluation. Kitada almost always starts the class with singing and/or everyone's short oral comments in English on recent experience in order to warm them up for more complicated activities of the day. The simple melodies and words of the songs (which are most of the time from Mother Goose nursery rhymes) are intended to free students from the strict evaluation system based on true/false type quiz. Impromptu short comments on familiar topics require students' quick response, which they are not so good at making.

After the project of "Leadership Topics," an evaluation sheet was returned to each group. The sheet includes five items as checking points: preparation; background information; class involvement; amount of class discussion; class enjoyment & feedback. Each item is evaluated from points 5 (excellent) to point 1 (poor/out of question) and the total of five items makes the final result. The best group(s) marked points 23 and the worst 14. In addition, teachers' comments are written in each sheet. Similar to this one, at the end of the first semester in 1996, Hadden and Kitada respectively made the evaluation sheet: the former for her Interview Test (on individual basis), and the latter for her Presentation/Performance Test (on group basis). Hadden's sheet includes such items as Pronunciation, Use of Structures, Initiative/Effort, Overall Fluency, and Content; Kitada's includes Contents, Fluency, Cooperation of the Group Members. We brought our results together and discussed the individual student's final score. Because the attendance is exceptionally good in "English in Action," we can focus on students' works. In Kitada's test particularly, there were six groups: a puppet show (on troublesome travel scenes); two singing songs (plus a hearing quiz to classmates); a role-play (on difference of cultures seen through body language); a TV show style performance (on the correct diet); playing a guessing word-game (involving all the classmates). With a guideline previously given to students, they contrived their activity for evaluation spending a full week outside the class for preparation. Judging from the criteria mentioned above, we should admit that the majority of participants demonstrated understandable communication skills in spoken English. If we observe them very

precisely paying attention to the grammatical mistakes or improper usage of idioms, we could say that their spoken English is poor; however, our present goal is not the acquisition of authentic flawless speaking ability but of the positive attitude toward the oral communication in English through their own activities, so that there was a lot to recognize and “evaluate” in them. At the evaluation of “English in Action,” therefore, we are not grading students by deducting points. We are watching students’ challenging attitudes for communication.

## 5. Further Tasks for Consideration

After several years of practice, we are required to clarify the present situation of “English in Action” and to point out the tasks to be considered further. Our original aim of team-teaching was to create an intensive English course in our curriculum but in fact it has been shifted to the support of students’ activities. With an English native speaker and a Japanese teacher compensating each other as a team, “English in Action” provides college students with comparatively abundant opportunity to express themselves in English. At present, as we emphasized above repeatedly, we do not demand accuracy from students but we expect them to be free from hesitation to speak out in public. Further, we expect them to acquire explicitness and confidence on the basis of their initiative.

Nevertheless, we can hardly neglect the fact that only 50 out of approximately 420 first year students are appreciating the two-teachers/twice-a-week course (by two teams): in comparison to the small number of attendants, the course requires double human resource, time, and place. In order to maintain and/or even improve the condition, we need to prove its effects more explicitly. Also, we should not be contented with the “fluency rather than accuracy” principle forever: what we expect finally is no doubt “fluency with accuracy.”<sup>(7)</sup> “English in Action” alone cannot achieve such an ideal goal. We need to interact with other English and related classes for comprehensive skill training. On the other hand, computer-assisted English learning system has started to be introduced into our curriculum recently. Along with Language Laboratory, where oral/aural training is intensively done, the new methodology utilizing computer, especially with the network including LAN and Internet, will enable students to reach for the actual international communication from their own campus. If we succeed in making use of a well-balanced combination of both the human resource/time/place-requiring course and the computer-assisted, self-learning course together, we would make a significant step forward. Apparently two different types of courses have something in common: they are both students’ activity-focused classes, where students’ initiative and responsibility only can produce the results. If we believe the potentiality of our students positively, we will be able to change our inclination to think we the teachers should always be the authority of the class.

The main point of students’ activity-focused classes is to let them discover the fact

that collegiate students have already acquired the basic knowledge of English grammar and vocabulary required for daily communication (or rather we should say they have already learned how to improve their language skills by themselves whether they recognize it or not) and that it is time for them to integrate the fragmentary knowledge for use. We the teachers are there to support their struggle for independence. In order to “facilitate” their independence, we should give them advice, hints, and suggestions; however, we should never evaluate them by deductions. It does not mean we should give up our responsibility as teachers but we should learn how to help students without depriving them of their own ingenuity.

### Conclusion

In Japan the majority of students seem to be shrinking from independence and reluctant to perform their creative abilities in class. In language learning particularly, silence and reservation of one’s own ideas may easily prevent the progress. Therefore, in the class where learners’ direct participation in activities is most highly evaluated, their willingness to overcome their usual habit of silence and reservations should be respected more than anything else. Meticulous checking of technical mistakes should be avoided absolutely. Instead, we should present them with good models of various interactive communication delivered in English. If we can induce students to become eager for action, the class will be the place for self-education, which is a desirable goal for any schools.

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### Notes

- (1) The subjects of Group A are “English Phonetics,” “English Drama Production,” “English Qualifications,” “Public Speaking I, II,” “English in Action,” “Oral English II,” “English Through Movies,” “Advanced Writing,” and “News English II.”
- (2) Ministry of Education made a drastic change of the framework of the academic standard for higher education, in which the traditional classification of General Education, Foreign Languages, Health and Physical Education, and Specialty Education was eliminated; thus, each institution has

obtained the liberty to settle its own unique curriculum in order to pursue its own characteristics in education. As for the details of the change of regulations, see p. 40, MESC.61, "The Monthly Journal of MONBUSHO," October 1994, Ministry of Education. Science and Culture. Japan.

(3) We learned the concept of "intensive" language course from the novel methodology which has been developed in Keio University at Shonan-Fujisawa Campus (KFC). The members of our Curriculum Committee visited and observed some of the foreign language classes at KFC in May, 1992. For the detailed information about the intensive classes at KFC, see "The Booklet for Taking Foreign Language Classes" issued from Institute of Languages and Communication, KFC, and also Ichiro Sekiguchi (ed.), *KFC: Challenges to Foreign Language Education* (Sanshu-sha, 1993), written in Japanese.

(4) Claude Arnaud writes her observations about the course in her essay, "A Case for Teaching and Practicing Speaking Skills in Colleges- 'English in Action, what's that?'" *Kenkyushitsu Dayori*, No. 26, (Toyo Women's College, 1994).

(5) Gregory O'Dowd made a survey of teachers concerned with "English in Action" in 1996. In his report entitled "English in Action: A Summary of Teacher Views and Thoughts" (January 1996, unpublished), he emphasizes the importance of enhancing students' motivation to engage in activities as well as that of providing "The stimulating learning environment" for students.

(6) Concerning the system of "Assistant Language Teacher," see p.26, Hiroyoshi Hatori, *English Education in Internationalization* (Sanseido, 1996), written in Japanese.

(7) For detailed discussion over fluency and accuracy, see Christopher Brumfit, *Communicative Methodology in Language Teaching-The roles of fluency and accuracy*, (Cambridge University Press 1984).