

FEBRUARY, 2012: BREEZE ISSUE #52

A FREE MONTHLY E-NEWSLETTER FOR FRIENDS OF JAPAN & TEACHERS OF JAPANESE

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It has been more than five months since I had started to work at Scott County High School. Scott County High School is located about 15 miles away from Lexington, Kentucky with about 3,000 students (including ninth grade). Currently about 100 students are taking Japanese I, II, III, and AP. My main job is to teach Japanese III.

What's Up?

When I assigned to this class, the students hardly knew each other's name. It was quite shocking to me

considering it was the second month of the school year and there were only six students. The way I see it, language education is about communication. I mean, how can you possibly learn any language without communicating? So, my first challenge was letting them talk to each other. 'お名前は何ですか。(What is your name?)' '趣味は何ですか。(What is your hobby?)' '週末は何をしましたか。(What did you do over the weekend?)'

Funtivities!

If you have seen a world language class in a high school, you can understand my struggle to let students speak the target language. They are too self-conscious and maybe too smart to make mistakes. The good news is I have identified their weakness. In order to overcome the weakness, I have tried dozens of different projects and methods in this several months. Some of them were successful and others were not really. Here I would like to share successful cases with you for your information (I am guessing most of the readers are teachers and learners).

Since there are several kinetic students in the class, we played a ball game one day. The rule is pretty simple. Students throw a ball to each other and the person who gets the ball has to do a task. Anything can be the task. For instance, 'count numbers with proper counter' or 'ask questions to the next person and the next person has to answer it and ask another question to the next person'. Interestingly, when I assessed students on this game, the result was very different from the ones of writing, reading, or interview tests.

Another technique is to use a name plate. I actually learnt this technique from a teacher in Indiana. (Thank you, Karen-sensei!) All you have to do is to make a name plate saying ‘日本語オンリー！ (Japanese only!)’ on one side and ‘英語で話してもいいです。 (You may speak in English)’ on the other side. Magically, students try to speak in Japanese. This sounds crazy, but you don’t even have to have penalty. If a student has tried to speak in English, you just need to say ‘respect the card!’ Teenagers love funtivity.

Recent hit was a board game. I think most of you like Monopoly. So do the students. So I made a kind of educational version of Monopoly in Japanese. We play the game whenever we have time and students love it. Here are differences from the regular Monopoly: 1. everything is written in Japanese and the currency is yen. 2. Chance tasks are Can-Do task of Japanese. 3. You have to speak in Japanese when you play the game. If you spoke in English, you have to pay a thousand million yen each to other players. Boom! I wish I could show you the dramatic change. They really speak in Japanese.

I know these are small steps and may not be enough. I would like to try more experiments.

To Be Continued...

There were ups and downs and there will be more. I know I don’t know much about what I am doing. I just began. All I know is that I like what I am doing and I like the students. I guess that is good enough for now.

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Annual Report

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