

The 2007 Mitaka Primary School *Eigo Katsudo* Teacher Training Seminar

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This paper describes and discusses a three-day in-service teacher training seminar that the authors conducted twice in August 2007 for 60 primary school teachers of the city of Mitaka in Tokyo. The focus of the seminar was on how to teach *eigo katsudo*, or primary school English activities, which have been a requirement for all grades in all public primary schools in Mitaka city since 2006. Following an overview of the current situation of *eigo katsudo* in Japan and Mitaka, the process of preparing and conducting the seminar will be described based on the observations made by the instructors and questionnaires collected from the participants. Finally, considerations for improvement of future seminars will be discussed.

On March 2, 2007, Japan's Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (MEXT) announced national survey results indicating that 95.8% of the 22,031 public primary schools in Japan conducted *eigo katsudo* (English activities) in 2006. According to the survey, the activities consisted primarily of English songs, games and simple conversational phrases, and were commonly lead by native or advanced speakers of English known as Assistant Language Teachers or ALTs (MEXT, 2007). The survey also indicated that both the number of schools and total hours of *eigo katsudo* have been rising steadily in the past few years. (MEXT, 2006).

Though the vast majority of primary schools in Japan conduct *eigo katsudo*, English is not a required subject. Within the current Japanese national curriculum standards issued in 1998 and implemented in 2002, *eigo katsudo* is positioned as "foreign language activities for the purpose of promoting international understanding." It is an optional activity for the "period of integrated studies" (*sougouteki na gakushu no jikan*) (MEXT, 1999). However, as indicated in its "Action Plan to Cultivate Japanese with English Abilities" (2003), MEXT has clearly taken a position of encouraging English conversational activities in primary schools.

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This position taken by MEXT generally reflects the voice of Japanese society, which values English skills as “an asset” (Butler-Goto, 2006). Certainly voices opposing *eigo katsudo* continue to exist (Otsu, 2005), but one study reports that more than 75% of parents are in support of making English a required component of the primary school curriculum (Benesse, 2007). Most teachers are generally in support of having *eigo katsudo* as well, but many are against the idea of making it a requirement due to the need to increase student performance in other core subjects (Benesse, 2007).

Eigo Katsudo in Mitaka

In 2006, the city of Mitaka officially launched a city-wide initiative to start *eigo katsudo* in all primary grades, assigning 10 hours per year for 1st and 2nd graders, 25 hours for 3rd and 4th graders, and 35 hours for 5th and 6th graders. The 2007 Mitaka Board of Education Policy has explicitly stressed the importance of *eigo katsudo* in primary schools for laying the foundation for fostering intercultural understanding and practical communication skills in English (City of Mitaka, 2007). A master curriculum for *eigo katsudo* was developed by a group of primary and middle school teachers, but much of the initiative has been left to individual schools to conduct research, develop methods and materials, and hire ALTs for their *eigo katsudo*. Now, in 2007, most schools in Mitaka are in their second year of conducting *eigo katsudo* in all grade levels.

In August 2006, the first *eigo katsudo* training seminar for Mitaka teachers was conducted for two days by Izumi Watanabe-Kim. In April 2007, the Mitaka Board of Education made a request for an expanded teacher training seminar, and it was decided that Izumi Watanabe-Kim and Mark Christianson (the “coordinators”) would plan and teach a three-day seminar twice in August, 2007.

Preparing the Seminar

Preparation for the seminar involved the following: (a) observations of *eigo katsudo* in Mitaka public primary schools and other locations including a private primary school in Hiroo, an English camp for Japanese children at the American School in Japan in Chofu, and primary ESL classrooms in the United States; (b) a needs assessment survey collected from participants of the 2006 Mitaka seminar and from all primary schools in Mitaka; (c) research of appropriate methods and materials for the Mitaka participants; and (d) planning of

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the training sessions in collaboration with the Mitaka Board of Education. The planning also included hiring three foreign students studying at ICU (two American, one Kenyan) to act as ALTs for team-teaching practice, and inviting ICU students interested in TESOL to participate and act as volunteer helpers for the seminars.

The Participants

A total of 60 participants attended the training, with 35 in the first session and 25 in the second. Four teachers from each of Mitaka's 15 primary schools participated. The four were composed of one lower (1st or 2nd) grade teacher, one middle (3rd or 4th) grade teacher, one upper (5th or 6th) grade teacher, and the teacher in charge of *eigo katsudo* of that school.

Of the 60 participants, 58 responded to the survey given on the last day of the seminar. 86.5% of them were female and the average age was 33, ranging from 22 to 54 years. The average number of teaching years in primary schools was nine, ranging from five months to 33 years. There was also a range of teaching experience of *eigo katsudo*, ranging from no experience (19%) to more than five years (11%). About 15% had a few months of experience, 37% had one to two years of experience, and 19% had three to four years of experience. In terms of self-rated ability of English conversation, 36% of participants indicated "no confidence at all," 55% indicated "not very confident," 9% indicated "so-so," and none indicated "confident." No assessment of participants' English level was conducted prior to the seminar.

During the 2007 school year, 96% of teachers planned to teach *eigo katsudo* for the number of hours specified by Mitaka (10 hours for lower grades, 25 hours for middle grades, and 35 hours for upper grades). Essentially, all *eigo katsudo* classes in Mitaka are "team-taught" with an ALT, and 87% of participants indicated that ALTs tended to be in charge of the *eigo katsudo*, with the ALT typically acting as the leading teacher for 80% to 100% of the class time.

Finally, the questionnaire included a survey of the teachers' perceptions of *eigo katsudo* (Appendix C). Regarding the statement, "*eigo katsudo* should be conducted in primary schools," 58% of the participants indicated "Strongly Agree" or "Agree." However, it is interesting to note that 30% indicated "Somewhat Agree" and 12% indicated "Disagree," reflecting the somewhat controversial nature of the new curriculum.

Teaching the Seminar

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Based on the results of the needs assessment survey and comments of the previous year's participants, the main needs of the participants were determined to be: (a) practical lesson ideas and techniques, (b) improvement of communication skills to work effectively with ALTs, and (c) opportunities for practicing lesson planning and teaching. In order to attempt to address those needs, a schedule (Appendix A) was set up for the expanded three day seminar.

Day 1: Ice-breaking, Goal Setting, Pronunciation, Classroom Phrases

The aim of the morning session was to create a non-threatening and constructive environment for the participants. It started with singing a comical "Shark Attack" song and then each participant chose an English nickname for herself or himself and met with other participants in a "Name Book" activity to break the ice.

Next, a discussion was held in Japanese to share participants' concerns in conducting *eigo katsudo* and to determine their goals for the seminar. Some of the goals written by the participants on the "Goals and Reflections" sheet given to each of them are summarized below:

- I want to learn how to plan, create, and teach lessons together with ALTs on an equal cooperation basis.
- I want to learn many fun games, songs, stories, chants, and other classroom activities and materials to make enjoyable classes.
- I want to enjoy communicating in English for three days so that when the term starts I can show my students a very positive attitude toward foreign language communication.
- I want to learn what other schools are doing and get a better understanding of what we should be aiming for.

In the afternoon, participants were divided into two groups (1st, 2nd, and 3rd grade teachers in one, and 4th, 5th, and 6th grade teachers in another) to practice classroom English phrases and learn concepts related to English pronunciation, such as rhythm, stress and intonation. They also learned concepts related to phonemic and graphic awareness.

At the end of the day, participants were given 10 to 15 minutes of quiet time to reflect on their learning and experience and to write ideas on the Goals and Reflections sheet. This reflection was conducted at the end of each training day, and the coordinators collected all sheets, read them, wrote comments, and placed reward stickers on them.

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Day 2: Four Model Lessons

On the second day, four model lessons were conducted by the coordinators to equip participants with practical ideas and techniques. Each lesson had a different theme, “Food,” “Animals,” “Greetings,” and “Countries,” and the participants rotated classrooms to observe and participate in all four lessons.

The thematic lessons, “Food” and “Animals” were intended to demonstrate how English skills can be taught in context. Many materials and activities including songs, chants, and picture books were introduced. For example, the “Animals” lesson included the “Old MacDonald” song, a picture book titled *Click, Clack, Moo, Cows That Type* by Doreen Cronin, and the “Animal Guessing” game, all of which revolved around the theme of farm animals. New vocabulary was introduced in context, and words were reinforced and practiced repeatedly in different activities.

The “Greetings” lesson was conducted entirely in Chinese by one of the coordinators for 40 minutes in order to allow the participants to experience how a child would feel on the first day of learning a new foreign language. The lesson demonstrated how pictures and body language can facilitate learning a foreign language using only the target language. In the “Countries” lesson, one coordinator modeled team-teaching with a foreign student from Kenya with an emphasis on showing how intercultural understanding can be promoted through *eigo katsudo*.

Day 3: Team Teaching Skills, Lesson Planning, Final Group Presentations

The final day started off with a discussion on how homeroom teachers can work effectively with ALTs. Some essential phrases for planning and teaching classes with ALTs were provided and practiced. Participants were then divided into six groups and spent 90 minutes planning and rehearsing a 45-minute *eigo katsudo* lesson to be team-taught with an ALT. Two American ICU students acting as ALTs met briefly with all groups to rehearse each lesson.

In the afternoon, as a final presentation, each group taught their 45 minute lesson, using some of the participants in the audience as students. After each lesson, a 10 to 15 minute reflection session allowed the participants to exchange ideas among themselves on how the lessons could be improved. The coordinators facilitated the discussion and commented on each lesson as well.

Reflecting on the Final Presentations

The final presentations served both as an opportunity for the participants to apply what they learned, and also as an informal assessment of their ability to plan and conduct *eigo katsudo*. At the same time, these presentations provided an opportunity for us to reflect on the outcome of the three day seminar.

The most noticeable aspect of the final presentations was that all participants demonstrated strong enthusiasm, creativity, and a cooperative team spirit as they created and conducted their *eigo katsudo*.

Within the preparation time limit of 90 minutes, the participants were able to decide their lesson objectives and activities, create necessary materials, and hold a rehearsal with an ALT in English. A typical lesson plan would start with greetings followed by an introduction of the topic or the target phrase. Then a song, game, or a picture book reading would follow. Most lessons included two or three main activities with each lasting for about 10-15 minutes. All of the lessons were full of creative ideas for language practice, most notably in their original adaptations of games familiar to many children in Japan such as “Fruit Basket.” The participants’ lessons often reflected their years of teaching experience and profound understanding of primary school children. Furthermore, all lessons were conducted almost entirely in English, even by some of the less proficient participants. Great efforts were made, and in our eyes, most groups produced *eigo katsudo* which would be both effective and enjoyable for Japanese children.

However, through observations of their lessons, the following additional needs of participants became apparent to us: (a) the need to improve team-teaching skills with ALTs, (b) the need to overcome limitations of their English skills, and (c) the need to learn basic principles of English language teaching and learning.

Learning to Team-Teach with ALTs

As a native or highly advanced speaker of English, an ALT can be an extremely valuable resource in *eigo katsudo* for exposing children to fluent English speech. However, in many lessons presented by the participants, ALTs were under-utilized. For example, in one lesson on shopping at a fast food store, the ALT stood silently on the side of the classroom while the Japanese seminar participant acting as the teacher pointed to a picture of French fries and prompted the class to chorally repeat “*po-te-to*” “*po-te-to*,” as they are called in Japanese. The ALT eventually stepped in and corrected the teacher, but it seemed that the

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modeling of the pronunciation for the new vocabulary should have been done by the ALT (Ogawa, 2006). The above case as well as other cases in the presentations led us to feel that the participants would have benefited from more training on how to share responsibilities with ALTs in team-teaching.

Currently, in most Mitaka primary schools, ALTs seem to be acting as the leading teachers in *eigo katsudo*, so this concern may not be an immediate issue, provided the ALTs are skilled and experienced. However, as the Mitaka Board of Education encourages primary school teachers to take more initiative in their *eigo katsudo*, it is essential that they learn how to work together with ALTs to maximize the advantage of having them in the classroom. In addition, it seems equally important to provide ALTs with adequate team-teaching training.

Overcoming Limitations of English Skills

For many participants, it was their first experience ever to make or teach a class in English. They certainly deserve our applause for their effort and courage to use English throughout the whole lesson. However, we felt that the limitations of the participants' English skills were, at times, hindering the effectiveness of the lessons. In addition to the example mentioned above of mistakenly introducing “*po-te-to*” as French fries, some other examples spoken by the participants were “Let’s game!” (Let’s play a game) and “You mistake!” (That’s not correct). Pragmatic transfers were commonly observed as well. For example, a teacher would say “please” (a translation of *dozo* in Japanese) instead of saying “here you go” to each student while passing out pieces of paper. Another notable instance was the use of Japanese mimetic phrases in a song created for the purpose of teaching English vegetable names; tomatoes were described as “*puchi-puchi*” and lettuce as “*saku-saku*” as they would be described in Japanese. From the way the Japanese mimetics were used in the song, we felt children could misunderstand that such phrases may be used in English.

In one sense, these mistakes can be seen as a positive contribution to the class, particularly in terms of the Japanese teacher serving as a language learning role model who is willing to make mistakes and learn from them. However, if the participants are to be in charge of planning and teaching *eigo katsudo* lessons, we felt that sufficient care would be needed to ensure that they provide accurate and grammatical input to students in their lessons in cooperation with the ALT. Or, if the Japanese teacher is required to teach alone, there may be a need to effectively use professionally prepared multimedia materials within the lesson.

Understanding Principles of Language Teaching and Learning

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Finally, we felt that many of the participants would benefit from an introduction to principles of English language teaching and learning. It seemed that many of them were not aware of communicative language teaching and the concept of meaningful communication in the language classroom. For example, many of the lessons presented by the participants had a tendency to be tightly structured, leaving little or no room for students to communicate their own ideas. In one lesson targeting the phrase “I like (animal name),” the teacher passed out cards with pictures of animals, and the students were asked to say the target phrase, “I like (animal name),” based on the card of the animal they received. The students, however, were never given the freedom to say what animal they actually liked. One important principle in language learning which might be helpful for this teacher would be the concept of “meaningful as opposed to rote learning” (Brown, 1994, p. 18) as the basis of more intrinsically motivating language learning. In the case above, the students would have benefited from a chance to freely express their own ideas and engage in meaningful communication.

Considerations for Future Seminars

The survey results (Appendix D) generally suggested that participants were satisfied with the seminar content. However, as described above, the final presentations led us to discover a number of additional needs and issues that future seminars should take into consideration: (a) the need to improve team-teaching skills with ALTs, (b) the need to overcome limitations of their English skills, and (c) the need to learn basic principles of effective English language teaching and learning. In order to address these issues, we suggest two points: more comprehensive analysis of needs and more guidance on principles of language teaching.

First, due to its limited scope, the needs survey sent out in April 2007 to all Mitaka schools only yielded a limited amount of information regarding the current status of *eigo katsudo*, teachers’ self-declared needs, and expectations for the seminar. Other essential information such as the participants’ English skill levels, ability to plan and conduct team teaching with ALTs, and beliefs regarding English language teaching and learning were not known until the seminar started, and therefore could not be considered in the preparation process. For future seminars, it would be beneficial to conduct a more extensive needs analysis, including a more comprehensive questionnaire and more observations of *eigo katsudo*.

Second, as mentioned earlier, the 2007 seminar was primarily designed to provide the participants with (a) practical lesson ideas and techniques, (b)

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improvement of communication skills to work effectively with ALTs, and (c) opportunities for practice of lesson planning and teaching. Emphasis was not given to explicit guidance or discussions of theories and principles of language teaching. However, as the final presentations indicated, many of the participants would most likely benefit from a more explicit introduction to communicative language teaching and learning in future seminars.

Final Remarks

Through such improvements as recommended above, we hope that future seminars will contribute to the continuous development of effective *eigo katsudo* in Mitaka. Much collaboration and networking will be needed among Mitaka teachers, ALTs, the Board of Education, and outside specialists to create and implement a curriculum that is easy to adopt for teachers and effective for students. Finally, we hope that ICU will continue to play an active role in this process as part of its contribution to the local community.

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APPENDIX A

Seminar Schedule

Time	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3
9:15-10:30 (75 min.)	Orientation Self-Introductions Icebreakers (English only ☺)	Group 1-Izumi: “Food” Group 2-Mark: “Greetings”	How to Team-Teach with ALTs: Phrases and Considerations for Planning and Teaching Together
10:40-12:00 (80 min.)	<i>Eigo katsudo</i> in Mitaka: Identifying Issues and Setting Goals (Group discussion in Japanese)	Group 1-Mark: “Greetings” Group 2-Izumi: “Food”	Lesson Presentation Preparation & Rehearsal Make a 45 min. English lesson (5 teachers per team, divided by grade level)
Lunch	Pizza Delivery	ICU Cafeteria	Obento Delivery
13:00-14:35 (95 min.)	Group 1-Izumi: Pronunciation Group 2-Mark: Classroom English	Group 1-Izumi: “Animals” Group 2-Mark: “Countries”	Final Presentations: 60 minutes per team 45 min. for teaching the lesson and 15 min. for discussion.
14:45-16:15 (90 min.)	Group 1-Mark: Classroom English Group 2-Izumi: Pronunciation	Group 1-Mark: “Countries” Group 2-Izumi: “Animals”	
16:15-16:30	Summary & Reflection	Summary & Reflection	Summary & Reflection

貴重なご意見・ご指摘ありがとうございました。

APPENDIX B

(Participant Questionnaire Continued)

Part 3 英語活動について

Q1. 小学校で英語活動を行うべきであると

強く思う

思う

少し思う

思わない

まったく思わない

理由 _____

Q2. 英語活動を計画し・教えることが不安であると

強く思う

思う

少し思う

思わない

まったく思わない

理由 _____

Q3. 教師自身の英語の力をつける研修が必要であると

強く思う

思う

少し思う

思わない

まったく思わない

理由 _____

Q4. ALT の先生と連携をとるのは難しいと

強く思う

思う

少し思う

思わない

まったく思わない

理由 _____

Q5. 英語活動は専属の ALT が主導で上手にやってくれれば理想的だと

強く思う

思う

少し思う

思わない

まったく思わない

理由 _____

Q6. 三鷹市全体で統一したカリキュラムや教材を作る必要があると

強く思う

思う

少し思う

思わない

まったく思わない

理由 _____

Q7. 三鷹市の全小学校の英語活動を統括するシステムが必要であると

強く思う

思う

少し思う

思わない

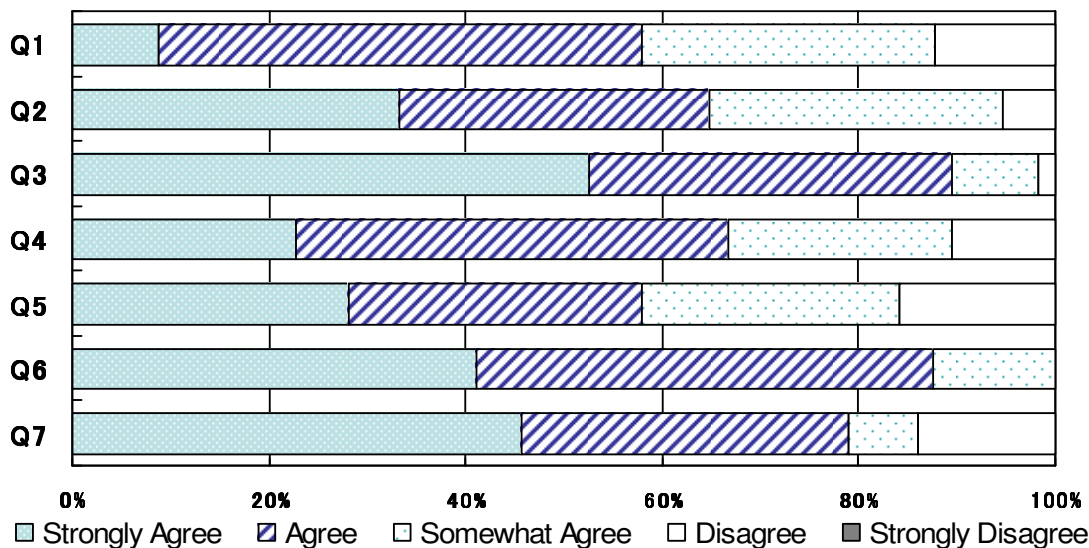
まったく思わない

理由 _____

ご協力ありがとうございました。

APPENDIX C

Teachers' Perceptions of *Eigo Katsudo* (Participant Questionnaire Part 3)



Q1. *Eigo katsudo* should be conducted in primary schools.

Q2. I feel anxiety in planning and teaching *eigo katsudo*.

Q3. There is a need for training to improve teachers' English skills.

Q4. Coordinating lessons with ALTs is difficult.

Q5. Ideally, well trained, full time ALTs should be in charge of teaching *eigo katsudo*.

Q6. A unified curriculum and a set of materials for the whole city is necessary.

Q7. A city-wide system to coordinate *eigo katsudo* is necessary.

APPENDIX D

Teachers' Evaluation of Seminar (Participant Questionnaire Part 2)

