Changing Times: 21ˢᵗ Century Elementary School English Education in Japan

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1．Abstract

　　The purpose of this paper is to see if the current course, **Methods of English Language Education** 英語科教育法（小）offered by Yamaguchi Gakugei University, meets the requirements of the new course of study proposed by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology（MEXT）for 2020, and if not, what steps need to be taken to meet them. We will discuss the situation regarding English education in Japan, review several of the course of study requirements proposed by MEXT, and discuss theories and literature that apply to those requirements. This paper will provide the current methods used in the **Methods of English Language Education** course in our university, and discuss how successful they are at meeting the proposed requirements by MEXT. When it is found that the current course offered by this university does not meet the new requirements, we will provide what we feel to be the appropriate modifications to correct the situation.

2．Introduction

　　"The first part of the Meiji period（approximately 1868 – 1881）can be summarised as being an 'English boom'"（Løfsgaard, 2015, p. 10）. It was basically from this time that English began to be seriously studied as a tool for Japan to speak to the world. In various ways through the years, the government of Japan has adopted different methods to make English a formal part of education in its school system. Although teaching English in Japanese schools has changed regarding the methods used, the content, and the skills to be developed, the goal has always been the same, to get Japan using the international language to build relationships with other nations. The "Senta Shiken" testing system which started in 1979 and changed to its current form in 1990, has been used as a focus for the instruction of English lessons, in classes ranging from junior high school to high school, for almost 40 years now. "English education in Japan has relied on reading, writing, and relatively recently, listening skills, as the only means to educate students."（Parkin, 2017a, p. 125）. It has been noted for several years now that although students can pass paper tests, they lack the skills to engage in meaningful conversations with real people in real situations. The 21ˢᵗ century is now here; it is time for necessary changes to be made to the English education system in this country, so that studying English finally gives everyone practical skills they can use. It is in response to this realization that the "Senta Shiken" testing system will be changed over the next few years, and Japan

will also be taking a more aggressive approach to educating students at an earlier age.

The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology（MEXT）will be making drastic changes to the current English course of study. One major shift will be changing English taught in elementary schools to grades 5 and 6 as a foreign language, to being taught as an actual subject. Figure 1. below outlines the changes being made by MEXT to the current English course of study, with the largest difference being the hours of instruction for grades 5 and 6 being raised from 35 hours in 2017 to 70 hours by 2020. Other changes will occur to the curriculum, including new textbooks to be used from grade 3 up to grade 6.
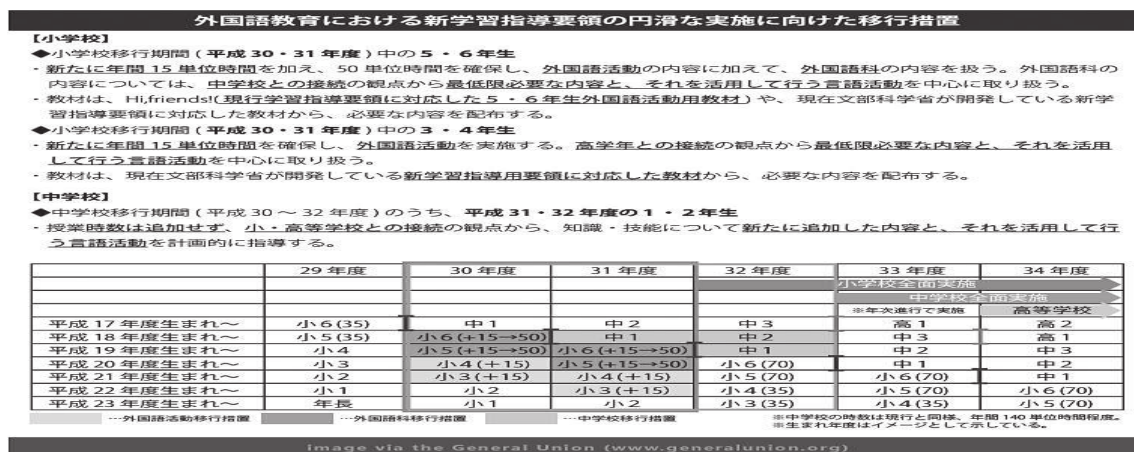
外国語教育における新学習指導要領の円滑な実施に向けた移行措置

【小学校】
◆小学校移行期間（平成30・31年度）中の5・6年生
・新たに年間15単位時間を加え、50単位時間を確保し、外国語活動の内容に加えて、外国語科の内容を扱う。外国語科の内容については、中学校との接続の観点から最低限必要な内容と、それを活用して行う言語活動を中心に取り扱う。
・教材は、Hi,friends!(現行学習指導要領に対応した5・6年生外国語活動用教材)や、現在文部科学省が開発している新学習指導要領に対応した教材から、必要な内容を配布する。
◆小学校移行期間（平成30・31年度）中の3・4年生
・新たに年間15単位時間を確保し、外国語活動を実施する。高学年との接続の観点から最低限必要な内容と、それを活用して行う言語活動を中心に取り扱う。
・教材は、現在文部科学省が開発している新学習指導要領に対応した教材から、必要な内容を配布する。
【中学校】
◆中学校移行期間（平成30〜32年度）のうち、平成31・32年度の1・2年生
・授業時数は追加せず、小・高等学校との接続の観点から、知識・技能について新たに追加した内容と、それを活用して行う言語活動を計画的に指導する。

	29年度	30年度	31年度	32年度	33年度	34年度
					小学校全面実施	
					中学校全面実施	
					※年次進行で実施	高等学校
平成17年度生まれ〜	小6(35)	中1	中2	中3	高1	高2
平成18年度生まれ〜	小5(35)	小6(+15→50)	中1	中2	中3	高1
平成19年度生まれ〜	小4	小5(+15→50)	小6(+15→50)	中1	中2	中3
平成20年度生まれ〜	小3	小4(+15)	小5(+15→50)	小6(70)	中1	中2
平成21年度生まれ〜	小2	小3(+15)	小4(+15)	小5(70)	小6(70)	中1
平成22年度生まれ〜	小1	小2	小3(+15)	小4(35)	小5(70)	小6(70)
平成23年度生まれ〜	年長	小1	小2	小3(35)	小4(35)	小5(70)

▢…外国語活動移行措置　▢…外国語科移行措置　▢…中学校移行措置
※中学校の時数は現行と同様、年間140単位時間程度。
※生まれ年度はイメージとして示している。

image via the General Union (www.generalunion.org)

Figure 1.

MEXT Proposed English Course of Study 2017-2022 ("MEXT's 2018/2020", *n.d.)*

With so many changes occurring to the English course of study for elementary schools, it only makes sense that MEXT must standardize and make changes to the current **Methods of English Language Education** 英語科教育法（小）course of study for university students, studying to become elementary school teachers. We have chosen for this paper a selection from the 18 requirements given by MEXT for the new **Methods of English Language Education** course that will be mandatory for all university elementary education students to take, starting in 2019. Given that the **Methods of English Language Education Course of Study**（MELECS）provided by MEXT has yet to be written in English, the titles we have used are based on translations we obtained for the purpose of writing this paper.

2.1 Creating English Foundations

MELECS emphasises the need for teachers to understand the link which will be created from elementary school to junior high school, up to and including high school. It is imperative for teachers to understand that English learned in elementary schools will be the foundation for their students' subsequent six years of English education, in junior and senior high school.

Many people may argue that making English a subject of study in grade 5 and 6 is just too

early, as Japanese students have yet to learn their own language. However, one researcher believes

> [At] Age 12 – Prior to about this age, the brain has been a sponge. It is during this period that the foundations for thinking, language, vision, attitudes, aptitudes, and other characteristics are laid down. After this stage of development, the windows close; the fundamental architecture of the brain is complete. (Norman, 2017).

Many educators of L2 learners of English believe that young minds can learn two languages consecutively, and by starting English as a subject of study in junior high school, Japan has been waiting too long. It is the belief of this author that the shift to educating students at a younger age will indeed build stronger foundations, allowing students to obtain a greater appreciation of the language at an earlier age. In the current **Methods of English Language Education** course at our university, it is stressed that it's easier for younger students in elementary school such as grades 1 and 2 to mimic perfectly such items as pronunciation and gestures. As students start to learn English as a subject at an earlier age, the foundations of learning will become much stronger, and fluency in the language will be much closer to native levels than ever before.

2.2 Learning English by Using it

This section by MELECS emphasises the need for learning English by using it as much as possible. In our course, the language of instruction is almost 100% English. This approach of teaching English using English as the language of instruction is termed "TEE". "It is reported that many students are in favor of English-only instruction... and students' willingness of communication had improved due to TEE. Although English teachers need to consider a range of factors including the situation for using English" (Iwai & Takagaki, 2017, p. 87). Like the authors who wrote the paper from which I just quoted, it has been found in our course that students' motivation to communicate improves greatly because of TEE. Some students may be in a semi-state of shock when they first receive TEE instruction, but soon their fears change as their English skills improve greatly. Students in our course not only receive instruction in English, they must also use it in almost every aspect of the class. As students engage in teaching their lessons to the class during the course, they are strongly encouraged to use TEE as their main method of instruction. Those that use the TEE method as much as possible produce significantly higher results during their lessons!

2.3 Listening for Comprehension

MELECS stresses that listening comprehension is a key element that must be understood

and exercised during lessons. TEE is a very good tool to use in a class, but without comprehension of what is being said, student learning will never occur. Listening for comprehension is an invaluable skill for "the development of listening is related to the attainment of proficiency in speaking. He continued that listening is the most important skill in language learning because it is the most widely used language skill in normal daily life." (Gilakjani & Sabouri, 2016, p. 1670). Elementary school students must be taught how to develop their skills of active listening, where words and phrases become building blocks to meaning, and to comprehension of what is being said. It is with this comprehension that students can engage in active conversations. Our students are provided several opportunities to listen actively, as well as equal opportunities to respond verbally in active conversations.

2.4 Oral Communication and Stages of Child Development

It is constantly stressed during our classes that we as teachers must remember the age and hence the developmental stage of our intended students. MELECS states the importance of basing the level of verbal communication used in a lesson according to the developmental stage of the children being taught. As Norman (2017) stated "Prior to about this age, the brain has been a sponge". The age he referred to was 12 years old, and prior to this age children as L2 learners of English are able absorb and process information more quickly. At a young age of about 6 years old, children can repeat with almost perfect pronunciation, but lack the ability to comprehend meaning without proper instruction. As the age increases, the ability to repeat pronunciation with almost parrot like perfection decreases, whereas the ability to comprehend meaning increases. With these changing abilities in mind, we as instructors of future English educators, must remain diligent in reminding and educating our students on how to always have age appropriate materials and methods of instruction ready for lessons.

2.5 Contextual Learning

Contextual learning as described by MELECS concerns meaningful communication being conducted, considering the variables of purpose and situation. In our course, we describe context as being who, what, when, where, why, and how, as the basic factors that affect meaning and hence the input and output of active conversations. Liddicoat & Scarino (2008, p. 17) stated "If the language learning program focuses on the code, then it models a theory of language in which the relationship between two languages is simply a matter of code replacement." When a language has been reduced to a code where logic rules like a mathematical formula, and emotions and context are ignored, then the output all too often resembles code as well. Students preparing for the Senta Shiken System often do just that, memorizing rote formulae in order to pass tests. They therefore, often do not have the needed skills to use the language in practical situations, where code is not required. Liddicoat &

Scarino（2008, p. 17）also said that

> If the language pedagogies focus on the interpretation and creation of meaning, language is learned as a system of personal engagement with a new world … In language learning classrooms, learners need to engage with the ways in which context affects what is communicated and how.

2.6 Connecting Oral Communication to Writing

MELECS expresses the importance of connecting writing to oral communication as a link and a support to the English learning process. Maria Montessori, who created The Montessori Method of Education, was quoted as saying

> Written language can be acquired more easily by children of four years than by those of six. While children of six usually need at least two years to learn how to write, children of four years learn this second language within a few months. （Baker, 2013）.

Although this statement may not be agreed with by all educators, it is wildly believed that the earlier a child is exposed to writing the easier it will be for them to learn. For children learning English in Japan, it is a necessity that they learn how to print the alphabet using roman characters as soon as possible in the elementary school system, if not sooner in my opinion. It is also important that the writing process should be learned concurrently with oral communication, so that the two forms support and build upon one another. In view of this, our course uses collective board writing activities, where students of different levels work together in teams to produce the language in both written and spoken form. The power of writing as it applies to L2 learners of English can be amply summed up by the following:

> "The potential role（s）of writing in second language development" "（1）its slower pace, and （2）the enduring record that it leaves, both of which can encourage cognitive processes and interactive moves thought to promote language acquisition, and （3）the need for and the opportunity for greater precision in language use, which may encourage learners to consult their explicit knowledge as they plan, monitor, or review their production." （Williams, 2012, p. 321）.

2.7 Fun with Words

In this section, MELECS proposes that teachers bring words to life, letting students see the power and enjoyment that they have, given different contexts and points of view. As we spoke of earlier with Liddicoat & Scarino （2008, p. 17）expressing that "focus on the

interpretation and creation of meaning" gives a "personal engagement with a new world", we can see the enjoyment or fun that a language can have with the use of various words. Our course explores the differences that words have when used in different contexts, one of which is cultural. As the author of this paper comes from Canada, differences in culture and the enjoyment that they bring to language often arise as sub themes during lessons. We also ask that students create sections in their notebooks labeled "Words are Power", and, in so doing, teach them the enjoyment of learning new words and the power which they hold when they are used.

2.8 Effective Lesson Planning

One of the most important lessons in life to learn is how to plan. As a teacher, using planning skills to create effective lesson plans is a must! MELECS states that an effective lesson plan should be structured so that it effectively achieves specific learning goals. In our course, we constantly focus on grade levels, teaching objectives, and stages necessary to achieve each objective. An effective lesson plan is essential to successful teaching for "When lessons flow sequentially, always reviewing prior knowledge and then constructing deeper understanding based on new concepts and skills, learning is relevant, organized, and comprehensible. Yesterday's learning is complemented by today's lesson, which leads to achievement tomorrow and beyond." (Cunningham, 2009, p. 103).

Given the great importance that effective lesson planning has especially to new teachers, we provide our education students many examples of proven lesson plans, for them to reference when they began teaching their own English classes. As with contextual learning, lesson plans must always consider the variables involved in each lesson, and then use teaching methods according to their given class, the resources available, and with regards to the teacher's own personal traits and abilities.

2.9 Team Teaching and the ALT System

Since 1987, when the Jet Programme first started, ALTs and team teaching have met with various successes and failures, both perceived and in reality.

MEXT claims that native speaking ALTs will increase learner motivation, promote cross-cultural understanding, enable more effective presentation of language content, especially dialogues, increase learner participation, produce effective educational materials and provide on-the job training for Japanese teachers of English. (Tonks, n.d.).

Some of the claims stated above by MEXT have proven themselves to be true, but as I stated above, they also have been found to be untrue at times in reality. The hope of the ALT

system was to build the communication abilities of Japanese students and teachers by utilizing native teachers with various backgrounds and interests. The system in many ways has raised interest for English language education students in Japan, but, even after some 41 years, the program's usefulness is still questioned by many. MELECS states that teachers need to be prepared to both team teach and to work with ALTs, being careful not to specify they both mean the same thing. In support of the "team teaching" portion, we have our students work together to team teach lessons as part of their required assignments. These activities show the importance of working as a "team" during the planning, creating, preparation, and implementation of lessons. We stress that everyone has different abilities, and that team teaching combines those differences as individuals, which creates a synergetic effect for the teachers as well as their students. They need to believe that even when working with an ALT, they are still very valuable role models of what their students should strive to become, and to show you do not need to be at a native level to communicate effectively with native speakers of English.

2.10 Effectively Using ICT in the Classroom

In the 21st century, ICT has evolved to levels which no one could have imagined just 20 years ago. Just one example is, if you are one of the few members of society today without a smartphone, then you are now part of a small minority. However, nearly 20 years ago even the term "Smartphone" was barely known to most people! For children these days, technology like smartphones is just normal, and they are growing up in an age where ICT is simply part of everyday life. With this in mind, educators should be using ICT regularly in the classroom as a pedagogical necessity, for it in itself is a language that the younger generation is fluent in.

In terms of learning outcomes, more school teachers are providing easy to understand instructions for children using ICT tools, and furthermore, successfully conducting classes in a way that assists children to extend and deepen their thought processes through the use of ICT.（Nakagaki, 2014）

MELECS indicates that teachers need to understand how to effectively use ICT in the classroom. Even though every school may not have a budget to supply each student with a tablet or PC, ICT can still play a role in English lessons being taught. Especially in the context of culture, ICT is almost a fundamental need in that you can show students about foreign countries, their places, people, food, and unique customs, all in real time. Connecting students to real people via the Internet, is something that is invaluable in a lesson. The author of this paper personally has had experience with this using Skype, as they conducted an open campus class in a school in Japan, while they were physically located in Canada some 11,000 km away.

Borders do not exist when ICT is used.

In our course, we utilize ICT as a valuable part of our curriculum and believe it is an essential part of the educational process.

2.11 Active Verbal Interactions with Students

MELECS stresses the importance of active verbal communication with students over time, to facilitate interactions between teachers and students in English. **Interaction Hypothesis** is a theory of second-language acquisition by Michael Long, which states that the development of language proficiency is promoted by face-to-face interaction and communication. (Parkin, 2017b). We believe that active communication between students and teachers in the target language, is an essential means to help students develop confidence in using English. During classes we provide several opportunities for students to talk with the course instructor, to overcome their fears of using English as a second language. Active verbal input and output is both encouraged and required, for students to be successful throughout the course.

3. Methods

3.1 Participants

For eight years, the **Methods of English Language Education** course has been taken as an elective by year four elementary education students in our university. For this paper we will discuss the most recent methods and materials used in the school years from 2016-2018.

3.2 Procedure

The basic procedure for this course involves a three-session approach. In the first 25 minute session of the class, students use an English language learning software called Tell Me More. The students then change classes and prepare for the second session. In the second session for about 25 minutes, they participate in an elementary school level English demonstration lesson given by the course instructor. In the final session for about 25 minutes, students conduct mini lessons. The lessons are based on sections taken from the demonstration class lesson plan, which the course instructor used to give the demonstration lesson.

We will now present the methods and materials used to conduct the classes within the three sessions listed above.

3.2.1 Tell Me More

As part of the utilization of ICT in language acquisition, we have incorporated the use of an English language learning software called TELL ME MORE Education v7...
Figure 2 is a copy of the phonics practise page, where students use headsets with microphones to listen to different forms of pronunciation given by the software, and they
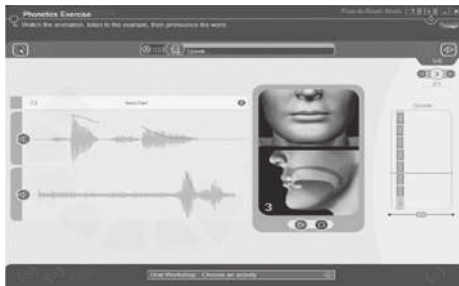
Figure 2

Tell Me More Phonics Practise Page

Figure 3

Tell Me More Dialogue Practise Page

Figure 4

Tell Me More Training Log for Students

Figure 5

QC Card (Question Crazy Card)

respond by repeating what they have heard. … Figure 3 is a copy of the dialogue practise page, where students are given a dialogue to listen to and are to choose from three possible answers, in which to give their spoken response. Figure 4 is a copy of the training log that is given to each student, in which they must complete at least 24 sections … (Parkin, 2017a, p. 132-133).

The Tell Me More software has been used with this course for 8 years now, and has proven itself as an invaluable ICT tool that helps students improve their English skills, and builds confidence in using them. The software has a six-level structure that allows students to personally tailor their learning to their own ability level, and to do it at their own pace. Tell Me More proves that ICT can be both fun and productive, when used in the right way.

3.2.2 QC Card

Figure 5 is a copy of the "QC Card" which Parkin (2015, p. 102) explained that: this little card has 35 small boxes on it in which a small stamp or a signature can be used to fill it. The QC card system works like this:

a) A student goes up to any teacher and says: "Excuse me, may I ask you a question please?"

b) If the teacher says "OK" or "Sure", then the student proceeds to ask a question in

English to the teacher.

c) The teacher will answer the question and decide how many points the question deserves. 1 point is given for an easy question, 2 points for a medium level question, and 3 points are given for a high-level question.

QC Cards are an excellent opportunity for our students to interact with not only the course instructor but also with various faculty and staff members in the university. English language skills develop through creating and asking questions, while relationships are made which are culturally and linguistically different than what students usually would have had a chance to make. Faculty and staff in the school love to help the students, and they too are given opportunities to use English, which they normally would not have. This one system alone covers many of the requirements listed by MELECS.

3.2.3 Course Instructor Demonstration Lessons

The second session of each class is where the course instructor conducts an elementary English school lesson, while the students participate and try to act like elementary school students. The basic time given to the lesson is about 25 minutes. During this time students can experience what it is like to be an elementary school student, while learning new pedagogical practises and theories. Before starting the lesson, students are provided with a copy of the lesson plan, and the instructor highlights main items needing attention. Throughout the lesson, students receive pedagogical explanations of what is happening, but also have plenty of time to think and behave like young elementary students. The class time is limited in that course students need to understand the many teaching techniques used, how to use the lesson plan, and imagine how to connect to the young minds of elementary school children.

3.2.3.1 English Lesson Planning Form

English Lesson Planning Form

Date	Dec 8th	Period	1	Class	Year:	3-4	Class:	
Date		Period		Class	Year:		Class:	
Main Teaching Objective		Time			# of Students		20 – 40	

STAGE	TEACHING PLAN	TIME
1	<u>Greet Students</u> – "Good afternoon/morning everyone/boys and girls !" "Good afternoon/morning Mr./Mrs./Ms./Miss !" "How are you?" – "I'm Happy/Sad/Sleepy/Hungry/Tired/Sick" – Use big gestures	5 Min
2	<u>Review – "Days of the Week"</u> Use the chant "Monday Monday Getsuyoubi …."	5-7 Min
3	<u>New – Time</u> 1st – Teach the basic "One O'clock Two O'clock " first for grade three students 2nd – Teach "One O one O two O three …." to grade four students and move to "One Eleven, One Twelve, One Thirteen" etc.	10 min
4	<u>New – "Whisper Board Write"</u> 1st – Tell the last student in each row what to write and when you say "Go!" they whisper to the person in front of them and so on, then the first person in each row writes the time on the board. When they finish writing they shout out their team number to the teacher.	10 min
5	<u>New – "What time is it Mr. Wolf"</u> 1st – Explain Story about Mr. Wolf and how hungry he is 2nd – All students stand in a line and ask "What time is it Mr. Wolf?" – Mr. Wolf responds "It's O' Clock" – The students count and walk times. 3rd – Students repeat this again and again until the wolf says "It's Dinner Time" – then the students hurry back to the starting line while the wolf tries to catch the next "Wolf"!	10 – 15 min
	LOCATION Demonstration Classroom	

TEACHING MATERIALS NEEDED		
TEACHER	Days of the week cards and lots of chalk!! Maybe a Wolf Hat or mask??	**STUDENTS**

Figure 6

Example: "Time" Lesson Planning Form

Figure 6 is an example of an actual lesson plan used for the teaching objective of **Time**. Students receive lesson plans like this each class, tailored to fit the specific teaching objective being taught. The course students must learn how to make each lesson level appropriate and to create a flow to their lessons, which allows their students to have consistency in their language lessons. The flow usually follows: 1. Greetings, 2. Review from last class, 3. Teaching a new topic/objective, 4. An activity to better learn/remember the new topic, 5. An optional second activity, and 6. A final farewell. Teaching using enjoyment, rhythm, reviewing prior information learned, new topics, and consistency are all stressed by the course instructor, and supported by the lesson plans created for each lesson.

3.2.3.2 Materials used in Demonstration Lessons

At the bottom of each lesson plan are two sections for materials needed, one for students and the other for teachers. Each lesson requires different materials to be used which may include ICT equipment, costumes, handouts, or various other items. Flashcards are often used during a lesson to teach new vocabulary. Figure 7 shows a variety of cards used from various

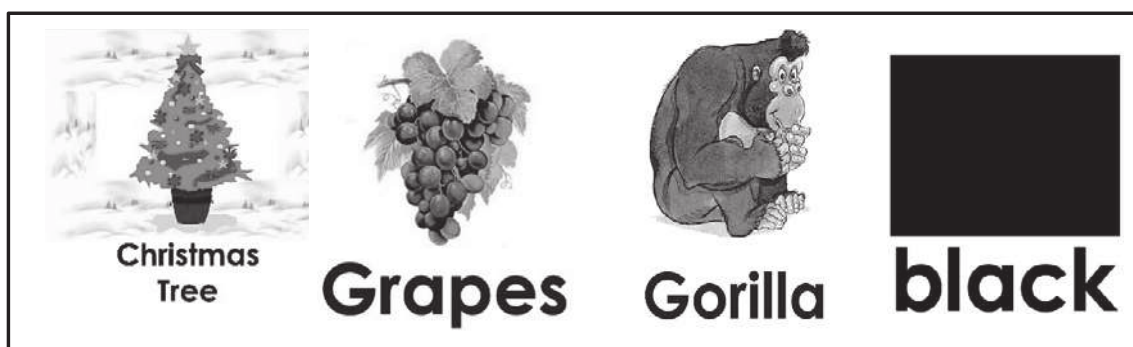topics that are taught during the course in the demonstration lessons.

Figure 7

Examples of Different Flashcards used in Demonstration Lessons

To bring lessons to life and to motivate elementary students in a fun filled environment, many different materials are used in addition to flashcards. Adding to the list above are instruments, picture books, stuffed toys, stickers, various colours of chalk, dictionaries, reception desk bells, large dice, play money, clocks, and several other items. Of course, as mentioned above, ICT is important and takes the form of videos, music, online maps, SNS services, various level based educational web sites, which are used to teach countless items including vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation. The key point to using any material in class is to bring the target language to life.

3.2.4 In Class Mini-Lessons Taught by Students

The third session of each class is devoted towards mini-lessons, where students select a "stage" from the current day's lesson plan to teach. The mini-lessons are usually only about 5 minutes long, and the students try to reproduce what they just saw the course instructor do during the demonstration lesson. This of course is not an easy task, for there is little time to prepare for such a lesson. This situation requires students to fully try to understand everything the instructor is doing during the demonstration lessons, while at the same time trying to be an elementary school student. In the beginning of the course, the mini-lessons prove to be very challenging to the students, but as they get used to the process many pedagogical successes occur. The key points stressed for the mini-lessons are confidence, using English as much as possible, "Perfect English" is not necessary, always connect with your students, and always stress enjoyment in the class while remaining professional at all times.

3.2.5 Final Team Teaching Exam

Yamaguchi Gakugei University - Year Four
Teaching English to Elementary Students
Final Team Teaching Exam

1. A) Choose a partner (One person if possible should help the last person without a partner to do their team taught class. Yes bonus marks will be considered for this help!)

   B) Choose a topic: 1) Animals 2) Fruits 3) Self Introductions 4) Colours 5) Days of the Week, 6) Christmas 7) Numbers 8) Body Parts 9) Months of the Year 10) Time.

   C) Sign your name and topic on Judging Sheet.

The test dates will be January 12th to January 26th. If needed maybe we will use February 2nd. Three 25 minute lessons will be taught each day. If for any reason you cannot teach on your given day, you must contact the school and will be given another chance on another day if possible.

2. Please note: if you need any teaching supplies like the ones I used in class, please tell me and I will bring it for your teaching test.

Also Note: Remember the topic you chose because it is very important! Please ask me if you have forgotten.

3. You must also **prepare a lesson plan choose a grade level** and **give it** to me before you start your teaching lesson.

4. Each lesson will be 25 minutes long. Usually a teaching lesson is about 45 minutes which is 5 minutes for greetings, 10 minutes for warm ups/review, 10 minutes for teaching new topic, 10 minutes for a first activity, and 10 minutes for a warm down or a second activity.

For this teaching test you should do greetings for about 2-5 minutes, a warm up/review for about 5-7minutes, teaching new topic for about 5-7 minutes, and then do one activity for about 7-10 minutes. Of course finish your lesson with a good bye and announce the winners of the class if you use the point system for scoring on the board.

I am sorry about the short 25 minute lessons but I know each of you can do it!!

5. Remember to act as a team and help each other. Of course you can take turns teaching different sections but remember to greet together and say good bye together. If your partner needs help then of course help them but do help yourself by practicing a lot. Do practice by yourself but remember to practice with your partner.

6. **Have fun** with your lesson and believe you can do it. Yes I will mark your English level but don't worry because the most important items for teaching English are energy, being positive, using the proper teaching rhythm and level for students to understand, and being confident!

Good Luck to Everyone!

Figure 8

A Copy of the Final Team Teaching Exam

Figure 8 is a copy of the final team teaching exam, which is the culmination of the **Methods of English Language Education** course. The exam requires students to use everything they have learned throughout the course, and throughout their time as education students in university. The exam incorporates many of MELECS requirements, beginning with team teaching. Working as a team throughout all the stages of planning, preparing, and teaching of a lesson gives students invaluable learning opportunities. One study found that "The teachers

who participated in [the] study valued collaborative learning for its potential to boost [English Language Learners] ELLs' social and academic engagement in the classroom and school, and for the gains in content and language proficiency…" (Lee, 2014). The final test teaches our students that collaborative learning is useful for team teaching and for L2 learners of English to acquire language skills. Another MELECS requirement is achieved by our students using TEE or Teaching English in English, while delivering their lessons. The students learn that TEE allows for improving language skills, as English is used in all areas of the lesson. The exam utilizes several other items listed by MELECS, but the final choices of what to use and how to use them are ultimately up to each teaching team to decide. Unlike a normal elementary school lesson which is 45 minutes long, the final team teaching exam is only 25 minutes. This restriction in time requires the students to have a strong understanding and control of time during each stage of their lesson.

3.2.6 Final Reflections

Figure 9

A Copy of the Final Reflection Sheet Given to Students

Figure 9 is a copy of the reflection sheet we give our students at the end of the course, which is to be submitted after they finish their final team teaching lesson. "Reflection as it pertains to pedagogy, is an essential tool that educators need to utilize in order to intrinsically promote growth within our students." (Parkin, 2017a). Considering this statement, we use the reflection process to allow our students to look at what they have experienced and use it to become stronger, both personally and professionally. As the reflection sheet is written entirely in English, as their responses must also be, students learn that meaningful communication can occur in any language and English is just a medium of expression.

4. Results and Discussion

The purpose of this paper, as stated before, is to see if the present Yamaguchi Gakugei University **Methods of English Language Education** course meets the new requirements of MELECS, which will be starting in 2019. In view of this, we will now provide the results of the methods we use in our course, and discuss if they meet the requirements given by MELECS.

4.1 Tell Me More

MELECS requires ICT to be used effectively in schools, and the Tell Me More software used in our course demonstrates clearly the effectiveness of such technology when used by students. Our students have shown high levels of motivation with almost 100% of students completing at least 24 of the required sections. Tell Me More provides opportunities to learn English by using it through various exercises in listening, reading, and speaking. English foundations are also strengthened, for the software gives instant feedback to deficiencies in pronunciation and in improper selections of answers. Contextual learning is also used in the software, as it provides various topics ranging from food to travelling, and it alters situations and speakers voices constantly. The variety given by the software forces students to consider context constantly, both visually and vocally.

The software clearly demonstrates the power of ICT in English education, and should easily help our students understand how to use such tools in their own classes in the future.

4.2 QC Card

Active verbal interactions with students is required by MELECS, and the QC Card system provides this extremely well. The use of the system in our course has proven itself to be more than successful in getting students motivated to come to the instructor, as well as many other faculty and staff members within the university, to use English. Although questions used by students at the beginning of the course are usually basic, the level of difficulty both grammatically and cognitively rises significantly as the months pass. Many times, the author is answering their office door to listen to students give their questions. The students learn how

much fun using different words and phrases can be. They also learn how important it is to listen for comprehension, because questions are often met with other questions requiring an appropriate response. In many cases, they finally come to realize that English is more than just a subject with certain universal catch phrases. They realize it is actually a tool for exchanging thoughts, feelings, and ideas which often are contextually based. Through this system, students can see how easy it would be to use similar teaching strategies in their own classes when they start teaching in elementary schools.

4.3 Course Instructor Demonstration Lessons

The current **Methods of English Language Education** course at our university is offered to only year four education students, and I believe it is for the best. We have found that year four students have the capacity to comprehend the value of the information they are given in the course. This is due in part to maturity, as well as to pedagogical knowledge, but also because they have experienced firsthand what it is like to teach real elementary school children. Students in year 1 and 2 do not have the abilities to understand the pedagogical value of such a course. In the Course Instructor Demonstration Lesson portion of the class, almost every MELECS requirement is met which we have spoken about in this paper, with the exception of the ALT system. However, given that the instructor of the course is in fact a Canadian, this gives great weight to the foreign factors which the ALT system is commonly known for. As demonstration lessons are given, students learn about creating English foundations with some examples being pronunciation, intonation, rhythm, gestures, speed, and volume, or better known as "Natural English". The demonstration lessons allow education students to understand how to teach and learn English in English, through listening, speaking, writing, and reading. They come to learn quickly how valuable it is to connect to students, by using verbal interactions. Constant repeating of the instructor's words as a class, answering questions individually and in groups, translating words, and working together as a class, are all techniques used in each demonstration lesson. The course students have, for eight years, responded favorably to such methods and often echo them as they use them in their own mini-lessons and team teaching exam.

4.4 In Class Mini-Lessons Taught by Students

Given that the preparation time for mini-lessons is so short, students often have to rely on instinct, which allows for clear evaluation of what they do and do not know. We have found that in the beginning the students lack confidence, have trouble using the lesson plan provided, and lack rhythm in performing the lesson. After they have had a few opportunities to conduct a mini-lesson, students' teaching performance levels improve greatly, as their own characters come through and they adapt to the lesson plan they were given to use. Active verbal

interactions with the students in the class improve, fluency improves, and when enough practice is done they begin to use appropriate levels of English according to the grade level they are supposed to be teaching. Many of the MELECS requirements are met during the mini-lessons given by students.

4.5 Final Team Teaching Exam

As discussed earlier, the final exam is the culmination of the course and demands of students everything they have learned. The exam requires as MELECS has stated: team teaching, English foundations, learning English by using it, listening comprehension, the consideration of child development as it applies to language acquisition, context learning in terms of culture and several other variables, the use of connecting oral communication to written communication, plus several other essential items. "Fun" is used to describe the use and appreciation of words, and in the final exam our students almost always let "fun" be a dominating factor beyond that of mere words. The final tests are usually filled with laughter, as mistakes are made while successes soar. Sometimes I think the audience/students for the lesson forget it is a test and act like real children, as they get caught up in the moments of the great lessons being given to them. When a lesson being given is not prepared for properly, the students in the audience always seems to give an awkward response, in fear that their classmate may receive a bad grade for their poor performance. The honesty of the moments during the team teaching exam are very clear to everyone. Most teams are very successful, some are OK, while others are beyond amazing.

4.6 Final Reflections

As our education students learn more about the new course of study proposed by MEXT, the reflection process in our course will serve as an effective tool for them to judge themselves according to the new requirements. The final reflections are also a useful tool for instructors of the course to evaluate how well the students have learned the MELECS requirements as well. The reflection process has been a very effective medium for students to communicate their thoughts about the course to the instructor. The students are usually very honest in providing useful information, regarding what items were most enjoyable, difficult, memorable, and useful to them. The reflections have also played an important role in helping make improvements to the course for future students.

5. Conclusion

This paper has looked at various requirements given by MELECS, known as the **Methods of English Language Education Course of Study**, provided by MEXT. It has also listed the different methods used in the **Methods of English Language Education** course which is offered

to our education students. The question which remains to be fully answered is if the course we offer meets all the requirements given by MELECS. To answer this, I will say that yes the current course offered at our university does provide almost all items listed, except for a few that I will now discuss. The first item concerns the MEXT recommended English elementary school text, which is to be used from grade 3 to grade 6. As it has yet to be released, we will have to wait until it becomes available to fully integrate it into our course. The second item regards the teaching of lesson planning. More time will be needed to help students understand how to fill out each section of a lesson plan, as well as teaching how to clearly write information in each section, so that anyone reading the form will fully understand each element listed. The third item regards Roman Characters or ABCs. More time needs to be devoted towards teaching how to write Roman Characters, as a basis for other writing activities which occur during the course. The final item concerns using more ICT during the lessons. It is believed that, in the future, more time will be needed to instruct additional ICT methods. Although lesson planning, writing of the alphabet, and ICT are all currently covered, it is the opinion of the author that more time may need to be devoted towards each item to help strengthen the course in the future.

Like anything in life, the current course **Methods of English Language Education** still has some room for improvement. As the saying goes – "The only constant in life is Change !" Our current course, like the English educational system in Japan, needs change. We will be changing our course according to the recommendations given by MEXT regarding MELECS, and will see the successes we've had so far improve even more in the future. 2020 will be here soon, and it is the author's belief that our university will be ready for it !

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