

Charles University, Prague

Faculty of Education

Re-training Programme

Course: TEFL Methodology

Student: Alžběta Holcová, secondary school teacher

Course work – Extract

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Part 2

As it has been already mentioned above in November 2008 I was asked to pilot ConBaT+ method at Gymnázium Strakonice, Máchova 174 which is a secondary school divided into lower and upper secondary level. I was given a training kit with materials, teacher guidelines in paper format, an evaluation questionnaire for learners and an evaluation questionnaire for the teacher's participants (Attachement n1). All materials were also supported with short film shown on <http://markun.cs.chinchu-u.ac.jp/japan/shodou/index-e.html>, where students could see how to write Japanese characters. There was also another very useful source, which was an interactive version of the Katakana table on <http://markun.cs.chinchu-u.ac.jp/japan/japan/Katakana1.html>.

THE PILOT EVALUATION

As a language and civic teacher I was pleased to realize that the pilot project content was *Japanese calligraphy for English and the languages of the class*. The title of the activity was *Japanese Alphabet – Katakana*. According to the Documents 3 in the given kit Katakana table was devised by Buddhist monks over 1000 years ago. It comprises 45 basic signs which are still used today. There are 5 vowels a, u, e, o which are combined with 40 consonants with additional modified consonants. Today the table is used to write nouns that have been borrowed from other languages and to transcribe foreign names.

The original subject which was this activity created for was the Art. As I am not the teacher of Art and our school Art teacher does not speak English I asked her for cooperation and we discussed possible ways of dealing with different problems and activities.

We worked with group of students from the lower secondary class where I am a class teacher and where I also teach English. There were 15 students all of them about 13 or 14 years old. Concerning students profile they were all pre-intermediate students who had been studying English for at least 4 years.

According to the training kit we were instructed to divide the work into three 60 minutes long lessons. According to the Czech school system each unit takes only 45 minutes. That is the reason why the timing of overall activities was three sessions (each 45 minutes long) and there was also one 90 minutes long lesson of Art when students were working on their final cardboard with their name and favorite Katakana sign.

Concerning the resources and materials needed we were given a list with

- White cardboard, black paper, a flat pebble, a black marker, white Tipex pen, scissors, strong glue

Work instructions were mostly given in English only those activities which were difficult to explain or show were conducted bilingually.

In the following paragraph are mentioned the competence the student should be enabled to in connection with Common European Framework of Reference for Languages Learning, Teaching, and Assessment.

Communication in foreign language(s)

- Consolidate English vocabulary (nouns) and introduce any other nouns from languages known in class
- Develop phonological awareness
- Use Japanese Katakana table to achieve these aims
- Develop curiosity in other languages and writing system

Learning to learn

- Work collaboratively as a part of learning process
- Draw benefits from a heterogeneous group
- Share what they have learnt
- Look for opportunities to learn and apply learning in a variety of life context

Digital competences

- Ability to search, collect and process information

Social and civic competence

- Work collaboratively
- Value diversity and cultural identities

Cultural awareness and expression

- Understand cultural and linguistic diversity in Europe and other regions of the world
- Develop creative skills which can be transferred to a variety of contexts
- The willingness to cultivate aesthetic capacity through artistic self-expression and participation in cultural life

Session 1 – Motivation and Questionnaires

The question of motivation is always one of the most important things concerning the further success of the whole work. As the pilot kit did not contain any instruction I decided to use something which are young learners familiar with. First of all, students watched John Logan movie *The Last Samurai*. Through this film it was easier for them to get more information about an old Japanese lifestyle and traditions. Then I asked them to think about signs and symbols in everyday life. Through the method of brainstorming they easily got to tattoo, necklaces, earrings and other things of everyday life where they can meet with Japanese symbols.

After this activity the students were asked to fill the students' questionnaire that was divided into two sections. The section A contained biodata and in the section B students were asked for their opinions about content based learning. There were five numbers from 1 to 5 that student should use to show whether they strongly disagree (1), somewhat disagree (2), neither agree nor disagree (3), somewhat agree (4), strongly agree (5) with the statement. There was no right or wrong answer. Also me and my colleague were asked to fill a questionnaires; again with the biodata and professional experience section and the section that contained our opinion about content based teaching and our role as an educator. The way of evaluation was the same as was described for students' questionnaire.

Session 2 – Let's study Japanese (a little)

On the contrary to given materials I decided to switch the first and the second working sheet and activities. It appeared useful to introduce the Katakana table and give the short history of this syllable alphabet before introducing calligraphy examples and pronouncing words from other languages.

Timing: 45 minutes

Material required: The Katakana table, short history of syllabic alphabet

Grouping: pairs

Focus on content: Discovering another writing system

Each group got one Katakana table (Attachment n2) and short history of syllabic system (Attachment n3) that was used later that lesson. Students were asked to call each syllable out loud while following the recommended direction, which is from right to left or from the top to the bottom. After discussing the sign and the reading direction student were asked few questions that follow.

- Can you guess where the first page of a Japanese book is located?
- Can you guess where the last page of a Japanese book is located?
- Do you know any other languages that behave in the same manner?

In the second part of the lesson students worked also with the history of syllabic system. First they were asked to try to guess following question while using only the Katakana table as a help. Some answers were possible to find in the table, some of them could be only guessed.

- How many signs are there?
- How many vowels are there?
- How many consonants are there?
- How old is Katakana table?
- Who invented the Katakana table?
- What is the table used for?

After the activity they were given the history of syllabic system and compared if they were able to guess the answers. After that there was a short discussion that finished the lesson.

Session 3, 4 – Raising awareness of Japanese characters (Katakana)

Timing: 2 x 45 minutes

Materials required: Japanese calligraphy examples (Attachment n4), Internet access.

Grouping: individual work/ groups of four

Focus on content: Discovering another writing system

Focus on language: Pronouncing words from other languages

In the first unit students several times watched the short film shown on given websites. They could practice their listening because the explanation was in English. The film showed

how to write Japanese characters. They could also study Document 1 on Japanese calligraphy with words from different languages as Portuguese, German, Spanish, French, Italian or some English names. Then there came one of the most interesting parts which was the work with an interactive version of the Katakana table on the second given website. Students could try to pronounce the signs according to the interactive system. For better imagination I asked two Vietnamese students from the school to help the group with pronunciation and understanding the differences. The discussion with these two students was very helpful and there were many questions.

In the second unit they worked again on computers. This time students worked with tables with different short statements or greetings. Later on they practiced writing an English noun or statement of their choice in Japanese from the table. At this point they were choosing and rewriting their names favorite word or statement and favorite sign for the final cardboard. There was always enough time for discussions throughout these two computer lessons.

Session 5, 6 – Japanese calligraphy on a stone

The final session was the lesson of Art where students were working on their final cardboard under the supervision of our school Art teacher. At the end of these two lessons there was a short exhibition where students could admire the work of their classmates or ask any questions they were interested in.

Timing: 2 x 45 minutes

Materials: The Katakana table, An A4 white cardboard sheet, An A4 black cardboard sheet between 2 students, a small flat pebble (approximately 5cm x 3cm), one black marker per student, one Tipex pen between 2 students, one pair of scissors per student, glue.

Grouping: individual work

Instruction:

- Prepare the A4 white cardboard sheet.
- Cut a smaller square in the black cardboard (6 cm).
- Glue the black square onto the A4 white cardboard sheet.
- Draw Japanese calligraphy by using English names and foreign nouns imported into Japanese through Katakana.
- Write a word in Katakana on each side of the white cardboard, with a black marker.
- Write your favorite Katakana sign on the pebble, using the white Tipex pen.

- Glue the pebble in the centre of the black cardboard.
- Sign your name in Katakana at the bottom of the painting
- Admire your work and show it to the class.

Session 7 – Questionnaires

As the last activity there was again the time for filling the questionnaires. The questionnaire was the same as the one at the beginning of the pilot. It was divided into two sections. The section A contained biodata and in the section B students were asked for their opinions about content based learning. Also the way of evaluation was the same.

Now it was much easier for students to answer the questions as they were familiar with the activity. Still there was a time for questions and final evaluation.

Final evaluation with commentaries:

- No motivation – even though there was no given instruction concerning motivation I am convinced that the teachers must not forget this important part of the learning process. On the other hand with no instructions I could decide myself what motivation would be the most suitable for my students.
- Students' questionnaire - I had to face a problem of confusing questions that my students were not able to answer. The problem was mainly in understanding the unknown words which I took as a challenge and let them use dictionaries to translate those that could be useful for them according to their level of English. There was also the fact that the Czech schools only use the mother tongue and at the beginning of the whole pilot students could not imagine how to “be taught the content based subject in my home language” (Attachment n1, Students questionnaire page 3, question n 20). In the Czech Republic there is no difference between the home language and the language they are taught at schools.
- Unfortunately there were no foreign students at the pilot class of Gymnázium Máchova 174 so we could not compare. Again we used this small problem as a challenge and because there are few Vietnamese students at school we asked them to give us their experience. This short discussion was quite interesting and there were many questions coming from the students from the pilot class.
- It was really useful to have an internet support. We had to use it many times and I have to say if there were no recommended websites it would be much more difficult to do the activity.
- As I have already mentioned above I decided to change the order of activities 1 and 2 as the given order seemed to be a bit confusing.
- Concerning the Katakana table and rewriting students' names, there were some syllables missing. Not everyone was able to rewrite his/her name.
- Very good idea of cross curriculum cooperation that connects English and Art because of the final product of cardboard. The cooperation of teachers is also important to mention as an advantage of the whole project.
- Many opportunities for work in groups that helps students to understand their role and position in the class with the opportunity to show their abilities.

