

Building Bridges, Laying Foundations, Maintaining Excellence

A Proposal to Further Improve the English Training Methods of Osaka City Board of Education

Having worked for the Osaka City Board of Education as a C-NET for just over a year now, I have thus far been very impressed at the dedication, professionalism and forward-thinking attitude shown by those overseeing the C-NET program.

One year on from its inception, I believe CNET has already been a great success, but that doesn't mean we can't still strive to improve further. In this proposal I will focus on the issue of ongoing training for CNETs, Japanese Teachers of English (JTEs), and Elementary School Home Room Teachers (HRTs) with whom CNETs will conduct team-teaching lessons.

Osaka has already established itself as one of Japan's most progressive cities for acquiring English, with these proposals, I believe we can go to the next level.

Proposal Breakdown

To make the proposal clear and easy to understand, I will break it down into the following sections:

- 1) Summer Training for JTEs
- 2) Summer Training for HRTs
- 3) Spring/Summer Training for CNETs
- 4) Ongoing English Training for HRTs
- 5) Ongoing Training for JTEs
- 6) Ongoing Training and Regular Feedback for CNETs
- 7) Proposal for the creation of a Native English Training Officer
- 8) Future CNET recruitment and sourcing.

My Background

Before we move into my proposals, I think it's important to set some context. As an English teacher of almost 10 years experience (6 years in Japan) I have observed and learned from a wide variety of teachers and students. I have also prepared and delivered a number of courses and seminars to teachers in the UK, Japan and Hong Kong on how to improve their skills. My specialist area is behavioural difficulties and special needs, but I have also given seminars in areas such as classroom management, working with multi-level learners, level-checking, motivating students, confident speaking and self-improvement. In Hong Kong, I also edited an education magazine, as well as created and delivered complete curricula on creative writing, media studies, public speaking, journalism and US university entrance (SAT preparation).

I enjoy the training environment and I hope someday to become a teacher trainer in Japan. I believe the CNET program has some great people on board, and I hope, that by following some of my proposals, we can more fully utilize the massive talent pool that we have at our disposal.

- 1) Summer Training for JTEs

In July of this year, I was fortunate enough to be invited to take part in the 3-day JTE training workshop held at Kunijima Junior High School. This was the first time since

coming to Osaka that I have had a chance to meet and interact with JTEs from outside of my assigned schools. Overall, I felt the course was an excellent and worthwhile exercise for both the JTEs and the participating CNETs, and the expert tuition and advice offered by Yukawa Sensei and Tabuchi Sensei will no doubt serve the participants well in the coming semester.

In recent meetings with Takami Sensei from the Board of Education, I was asked if I felt it would be feasible for the CNET group to host JTE training on their own next year. I believe the CNET group has more than enough talent to make a highly successful seminar for JTEs. The key element is planning. We need to plan seminars such as these as far in advance as we possibly can.

Also, I think the seminars would benefit from a greater variety of presenters. Instead of having one seminar over 3 days, I think it may be better to have a series of half day or one day seminars, covering different issues JTEs and CNETs may encounter in their everyday classes.

A typical set up for 3 days of seminars could look something like this:

Day 1: *Classroom management and Maintaining an English Environment.*

In the morning JTEs will receive a lecture followed by Q and A from a CNET specializing in Classroom management. Various group based activities and role plays will reinforce the main points of the lecture/discussion.

In the afternoon, we will build upon the main points of the morning session as we look at various ways to maintain an English-only environment in the classroom even when unforeseen situations, such as discipline problems, arise. Groups will each plan and present a mini-lesson (10 minutes approximately) to show what they have learned over the day. The seminar closes with feedback, questions and written (English) reflection.

Day 2: *Activities and Motivation*

On day two, we will look at some good ideas for activities and games that JTEs can easily adapt and use in their classrooms. Groups will have the opportunity to try these out during the course of the morning through role play.

In the afternoon, a CNET will give a lecture on motivation. What techniques can we use to improve students motivation in the classroom?

How can we encourage them to take part in lessons, even when they don't like English and think it is too hard? As with day one, activities and group discussions will augment the presentation. The day will finish with Q and A and reflection.

Day 3: *Self-Improvement: How can I be the best teacher I can be?*

Utilizing some of the motivational techniques from day 2, Day 3 will be about self-reflection and how teachers can improve themselves. In the morning, various lecturers from the CNET group will share accounts of problems they encountered whilst teaching in Japan and how they resolved them. JTEs will also be encouraged to recount their own problems, and if they didn't resolve them, the whole group can discuss and brainstorm as to how to resolve these problems.

In the afternoon, the tables will be turned as the JTEs will be asked: "What makes a perfect CNET?" In groups, the JTEs will brainstorm the good points and bad points about team-teaching, then each group will present their results. Following this, a discussion and Q and A will be held. This kind of activity should be kept light-hearted, with the emphasis on building empathy between CNETs and their JTE colleagues.

What I have outlined above is just a very basic plan for 3 days of JTE training conducted by the CNET group. I believe that rather than just "learning English" these seminars should follow the excellent example set this year by Yukawa Sensei and

teach new skills through the medium of English. That way we encourage what is known as “passive learning” where students improve their English on a subliminal level without actively studying the language.

Subject to time and venue availability, summer training could run far beyond three days, maybe even one or two weeks. However, to keep enthusiasm high, I would suggest that JTEs are encouraged to choose only 2 or 3 days to attend. This way, we can achieve “targeted training” where students study with a higher level of motivation, since they have been given the choice of subject to study.

In this regard, it may also be a good idea to canvas the opinions of JTEs now, to see what kind of areas they would like to study in training next summer.

2) Summer Training for HRTs

Providing adequate training for Elementary School HRTs presents a series of challenges quite different from those of training JTEs. Unlike JTEs, HRTs do not use English every day, and in some cases may have little or no prior experience of speaking English. This needs to be reflected in the type of training we offer them.

I spoke earlier about “passive learning” and how this facilitates further English improvement without direct study. Unfortunately for passive language learning to work effectively students need to have a sufficient knowledge and vocabulary already. Since HRTs are not required to reach a certain level of English prior to employment, many of them lack the necessary language base to facilitate passive learning. Its important we try to bring them up to that level as soon as possible.

Like many CNETs, I worked in the Eikaiwa industry earlier in my career. One of the reasons why Eikaiwas are so prevalent in Japan is their use of a “total immersion environment”. In other words, only English is spoken throughout the entire duration of the lesson. Though this may be daunting at first, students soon adapt to it, and are able to learn much faster than they would in a regular classroom.

In order to raise the overall English level of our HRTs as soon as possible, I would propose holding a 2-week “Intensive English course” over the summer holidays. HRTs would attend every day for 2 weeks and each day would be conducted 100% in English.

Of course teaching beginner or near beginner level students in an English-only environment does require a high level of teaching skill. Luckily I have extensive experience from my Eikaiwa days of preparing and delivering intensive courses from 1-week to 3 months in length for beginner level students. I would be happy to share this expertise with my fellow CNETs. With sufficient training, in a relatively short period of time, we could have a number of CNETs delivering these intensive English courses all over the city. The key is to keep the instruction simple, the materials easy to understand and to know when and where to step up the difficulty level. Under my guidance, I am sure the CNET group can learn these skills in a very short time.

3) Spring/Summer Training for CNETs

Providing suitable training for such a large and diverse group as the CNET program is not easy. Some like me have many years experience, others not so much. Some are qualified teachers in their home countries, some are not. Some of us are fluent in Japanese, others are not.

Given these massively different backgrounds, I can understand why the BOE would find difficulty in planning and performing CNET training. The BOE deserves a great

deal of credit for trying to do in-house training back in April. However, the training did have a number of flaws and I can understand why training for this summer was outsourced. However, with sufficient planning, organization and better self discipline, I believe the next CNET training could easily be conducted in-house by the CNET group without the need for expensive and inappropriately focused training from outside agencies.

This has two major benefits:

- △ In the current times of limited budgets and financial upheaval, taking training in-house will save the Board of Education a great deal, compared to outsourcing to expensive dispatch companies.
- △ It also has the additional benefit of enabling us to provide “targeted training” to CNETs. In other words, teachers can study the specific areas where they feel they need to improve.

The main problem with outsourced training seminars is that they don't take into account the specialist needs of the individual teachers. Instead, they adopt a “one size fits all” approach, and in trying to please everyone, they actually please no-one.

In discussions with other CNETs there seems to be some common themes of criticism with regards to the training seminars we have attended as a group. First with Interac in August 2013, then with the CNET facilitators in April this year and finally with Altia Central this August.

In all of the seminars, CNETs felt that too much time was spent listening to lectures rather than engaging in discussion and activities. Many also felt that having everyone (more than 100 teachers) in the same room at the same time was too much, and this allowed for very little time and space for questions, individual study or active discussion.

Many teachers felt patronized by the training sessions delivered by Interac and Altia Central. This is not necessarily the dispatch company's fault as they were trying to create a training course that could benefit everyone. However, both companies failed to recognize that all the teachers on CNET are experienced teachers. In no case is this a teacher's first teaching job. Many CNETs felt the training was aimed at completely new teachers and therefore had no relevance to them. Hence, motivation and participation declined.

I mentioned earlier the importance of “targeted training” to meet the specific needs of individual teachers. For CNETs, targeted training is, I believe, the most effective way to improve the teaching and knowledge base of the CNET group.

To implement targeted training effectively. I suggest we abandon the idea of having one big training seminar where everyone comes together in April and August.

Instead, over the course of one week in April and one week in August, host a series of seminars, in different locations across the city, and set a limit of 40 participants in each. We should aim to hold about 8-10 different seminars in April and August.

CNETs must attend at least 3 seminars in April and 2 in August. This way, they will still receive the same 5 days of training that they currently do. However, as with JTEs, motivation will be higher, as the CNETs can choose what areas they want to study.

These seminars will be hosted by current CNETs with expertise in a particular area.

Based on discussions with other CNETs, here is a list of some areas where they feel they could benefit from further training:

- 1) Classroom Management, Student Discipline

- 2) Classroom Japanese (although CNETs should not be using Japanese in their classes, many feel they would benefit from some training in order to better understand what is being said by the students and JTE in the classroom.)
- 3) Language Theory: How language is acquired, phonetics, new teaching techniques, etc.
- 4) Cultural adaption: how to build better relationships with colleagues.

This list is by no means exhaustive, and as with the JTEs, it would probably be a good idea to have a survey of some kind to see what teachers want to learn.

4) Ongoing training for HRTs

As I stated earlier, for the next couple of years, our primary focus for the Elementary School HRTs should be to improve their English communication level. We should aim to sometime in the medium to long term have a situation where HRTs can communicate in English at close to the same level as JTEs. This may sound like a very difficult goal, but with the correct planning and proper follow-up, I believe it is realistically attainable in the next few years.

As I explained before, HRTs should spend the summer doing intensive English courses. To follow on from this, CNETs should offer Eikaiwa lessons to their HRTs during holiday periods, like winter and spring vacation and any other non-teaching days. The lessons typically last from 40 minutes to 1 hour, are completely conversation based, and are conducted completely in English.

For those who haven't taught at Eikaiwa before, the Eikaiwa methodology is very easy to pick up and could easily be taught to those CNETs who need it.

For those more enthusiastic about improving their English, I believe Osaka could benefit from following the example of Kurashiki City in Okayama Prefecture.

I previously worked in Kurashiki for 2 years, and I believe Osaka would do well to adopt some of the initiatives used there.

One example of this is the weekly English culture lessons.

Once per week, a CNET would host an evening English class of about 90 minutes in length for local public sector workers to attend. The class could be conversation or culture based and the job should be rotated around the CNET group to keep it interesting for the students. Elementary HRTs and JTEs should be encouraged to attend these evening classes. The CNET should be paid a one-off overtime payment for carrying out this class. Something in the region of 5000 yen, plus commuting costs would be appropriate.

In addition to regular Eikaiwa lessons at school, CNETs should also be invited to join HRTs when they have their Kenkyusha, where possible. Not only will this benefit the HRT, but it will also benefit the CNET, as training together will strengthen the bond between them and as such their in-class teamwork will improve.

HRTs should also be surveyed at regular intervals to ensure the training is meeting their needs.

5) Ongoing Training for JTEs

In addition to summer training, JTEs will also need regular training throughout the year to ensure their English level is maintained and also to make them aware of any emerging trends in English teaching and any new techniques that may prove useful in the classroom. This can be conducted in one of two ways:

- △ Delivered in a large group setting.

^ Delivered locally by that area's CNET

Both ways have their merits, however research has shown that the smaller the group, the more effective the learning environment is to the students.

So, I believe that getting the CNETs to deliver the training locally to their own JTEs is the best way forward. The most difficult part will be scheduling, given that JTEs already have so many additional responsibilities besides teaching. However with cooperation from the schools and JTEs I believe it is achievable. Further discussions and negotiations in this area will be required. We should aim to conduct JTE training at least 4 or 5 times throughout the school year, in addition to the summer workshops. The form this training will take will be dependent on the survey of JTEs conducted after the summer workshops

6) Ongoing Training and Regular Feedback for CNETs

Ongoing training is one area where I believe the CNET program is in need of refinement. We have some excellent teachers in our group but I believe everyone could benefit from more feedback and greater communication with the BOE.

Last year I had one of my elementary lessons observed, I did not have a junior high observation. In the following meeting, besides the comment that my lesson was "The best I have seen so far." My coordinator didn't offer much in the way of feedback, or suggestions for improvement. Whilst I am glad that the coordinator was happy with my lesson, I do feel it would have been beneficial to have more detailed feedback and more frequent observations.

I believe we should aim to have each CNET observed 4 times per year, 2 times in Elementary School and 2 times in Junior High School. The first observation should be conducted near the beginning of the academic year, with as much feedback and suggestions for improvement offered as is possible.

The second observation should take place later in the school year, towards the end of semester 2, to see how well the CNET has improved upon the initial observation.

Where possible the same junior high and elementary classes should be observed in semester 1 and 2 to give the best overall picture of the teacher's improvement.

Where specific training needs are identified, these can be followed up in training seminars the following spring/summer.

7) Proposal for the Creation of a Native English Training Officer

Many of the initiatives I have outlined above will require considerable time and resources to accomplish. In order to deliver on these targets in a timely, efficient and cost-effective manner, I believe that the BOE should create the role of Native English Training Officer. The Training Officer's remit will be wide-ranging, with a number of responsibilities. The Training Officer should, I believe, be recruited out of the current CNET group, and be someone with extensive experience of teacher training, recruitment and several years of classroom experience.

In terms of working schedule, the Training Officer will be based primarily at the BOE, but should still teach at a school for 1 or 2 days per week, to ensure they do not fall out of touch with current classroom issues. For the other 3-4 days of the working week, the Training Officer will cover many areas. These will include:

^ Designing training programs and seminars for JTEs, HRTs and CNETs, in cooperation with the BOE.

- ⤴ Meeting regularly with CNETs and the BOE to identify future training requirements/problems.
- ⤴ If a CNET is having problems with classes at a particular school, the Training Officer will visit that school, observe the lesson and then offer advice and comments to the CNET.
- ⤴ Assist coordinators with lesson observations, and offer advice and comments where appropriate.
- ⤴ Conducting ongoing English training for JTEs, HRTs and CNETs, responding to inquiries from HRTs and JTEs about improving their English.
- ⤴ Overseeing and supervising special events such as English Day.
- ⤴ Actively participate in sourcing and interviewing of future candidates for the CNET program.
- ⤴ Act as an initial point of first contact for CNETs having problems at their schools.
- ⤴ Develop marketing and promotional materials for English events in Osaka.
- ⤴ Act as a substitute teacher in the event of CNET resignation/long-term illness.

Some important additional points about the Training Officer:

- ⤴ The Training Officer should, at least in the beginning, have the same pay and conditions as a regular CNET.
- ⤴ The Training Officer should be someone with at least 1 year of previous experience working in the CNET program as a CNET.
- ⤴ The Training Officer should be someone who is committed to staying in Osaka long term. Plans such as raising the English level of HRTs may take several years to realize.
- ⤴ Any part the Training Officer takes in observing other CNETs should be in an advisory capacity only. Assessing CNETs capability to remain on the program is a power reserved only for the BOE.
- ⤴ Likewise recruitment, the Training Officer will source, qualify and interview candidates, but have no say in actual hiring decisions.

Whilst hiring an additional CNET to replace the role vacated by the Training Officer may be expensive, It is a drop in the ocean compared to the annual costs of outsourcing training and recruitment to dispatch companies. I will elaborate further on recruitment strategies in the next section. It may also be possible to create the Training Officer role without additional staffing costs. The Training Officer will still teach in some schools so with appropriate reshuffling of current CNETs, the gaps could be filled without incurring additional staffing costs.

8) Future CNET Recruitment and Sourcing

Osaka is a trendsetter in shifting its English teacher program away from dispatch companies to a direct hire model. This is becoming more common across Japan now, with more and more Boards of Education making huge cost savings each year, by switching to direct hire. However, with direct hire comes the additional headache of finding suitable candidates. This is especially problematic for a city like Osaka with so many schools and such a large number of jobs to fill.

However, having worked in recruitment for 5 years, including a few months in Japan as a corporate head-hunter, I know that recruiting good candidates really isn't that difficult. The CNET program is one of the highest paying ALT-type jobs in Japan,

and is certainly the best paying in this region. It also offers highly favourable working hours, almost no weekend work and no evening work. These conditions make this the kind of job most teachers in Japan dream of.

So, why is it so difficult to find good teachers?

In short, if people don't know about a job, they can't apply for it.

More needs to be done to publicise the CNET program, in order to attract more, and better qualified candidates. There are many ways we can achieve this:

- ⤴ Create an English language homepage for the CNET program, allow interested candidates to apply via this website.
- ⤴ Give people who view the website the option of signing up for a regular online newsletter, that offers further information and stories about being a CNET. It also informs candidates of any vacancies that may come up throughout the year.
- ⤴ Promote the program to the public through participation in city events and festivals.
- ⤴ Introduce a referral program where existing CNETs can directly introduce people they know. Guarantee an interview to any candidates introduced this way, who meets the basic requirements.
- ⤴ Utilise social media. Set up an official CNET page on Facebook and Twitter, make sure this is updated regularly. Ideally daily, but at least weekly.
- ⤴ Produce a quarterly magazine/newsletter for distribution in the various ward offices around the city.
- ⤴ During busy recruitment periods, make use of various recruitment websites such as Gaijinpot, Daijob etc.

Recruitment is another area where the training officer can help out. From experience, I can say that recruitment really isn't so difficult, once you have a grasp of the fundamentals.

Final Summary

In closing, the CNET program is a fantastic program, one that the city of Osaka should feel very proud of. I can say without hesitation it is both a pleasure and a privilege to work here.

We have already accomplished so much, and, with just a little more work, we can take English in the Kansai area to a whole new level.

Thank you for taking the time to read this proposal. Should you have any questions or comments, I can be contacted by email: liam.carrigan67@gmail.com