

Milestones of a Life in Teaching

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The happenings that affected my life course and fed into my teaching life

I started my career as an accountant of an American company after graduating from college because my major was accounting.

Several years later, I began to work as a director of an international student exchange organization. In 1982, I sent 50 Japanese high school students to the United States. There was a student whose father was working for the Board of Education in the old downtown Tokyo.

At that time, the Board of Education was looking for an English teacher for senior citizens as there were a lot of older people living in the area. Then, the student's father asked me if I was interested in teaching English to older learners. Anyway I accepted their offer to teach English to them while I was working for the organization.

As time went by, I found it more and more difficult to work as a director of the organization and teach English to senior citizens at the same time. Therefore, I finally decided to help older learners rather than young high school students because they were increasing in numbers in the Japanese society.

What's more, I felt that my experience in working for both an American company and an international student exchange organization could equip me to deal effectively with them even if I had nothing to do with English education. In fact, they want to use English as the means of communication with native speakers of English

Setbacks I had to overcome.

From 1982 to 1999, I had to teach English from scratch. To begin with, I had to teach them how to write the alphabet. During the Second World War, The study of English was strictly prohibited because it was the enemy's language. But after the Second World War, Japanese people were suddenly asked to study English because Japan was under American occupation for several years.

Since 2000, I have been teaching spoken English. I found out that most of them were victims of the way English used to be taught in schools. For example, they had been taught English under the exam-oriented Japanese education system. They had studied English as if it were an ordinary school subject to be tested instead of a social activity. They felt that it was not something to be used outside the classroom in the real world.

Japanese English teachers had emphasized grammar and translation instead of speaking and listening. This method led them to think of speaking English as a matter of memorization and translation of words. This grammar translation method did not allow for creativity in using English.

How JALT has helped me develop my English teaching

I joined JALT in 1999 as a treasurer of West Tokyo Chapter because my major in college was accounting.

Then, I was a national vice president of JALT from 2001 to 2005. As I was an only Japanese national director, I must often communicate with the other six non-Japanese national directors efficiently. What I found out was they tried to be honest with their feelings and thoughts. Some of them even tried to disagree politely with the opinions of others.

They placed great value on words and ideas. They seemed to

believe that they could determine the rightness or wrongness of an action by rational reasoning. In the process being exposed to this set of values, I was able to develop a new style of communication. This style of communication is very important for me when I teach spoken English to older learners because I have never studied abroad. Also, JALT is a school where I come to learn how to teach English by attending a lot of presentations.

My interest in teaching senior citizens

Luckily, older learners come to the classroom with a unique advantage. They have life experience.

And, unlike younger students, they've already achieved a high level of proficiency in Japanese language. Speaking activities work even better when they speak about their own personal recollections, thoughts and ideas because they want to speak about the very same things in English on a daily basis.

The last comment

As we get older, Nerve cells are dying day by day. Memory is beginning to fail faster if we don't use brain. In short, if you don't use it, you lose it. I am happy to teach English to older learners because the study of English could slow down their aging process.