Teaching Lab: Gearing up for English medium classes

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Reference data:

As English medium content courses are increasing at Japanese universities, institutions struggle with how to best support content specialist faculty members who are required to teach content courses to L2 learners. This paper describes the early stages of a Teaching Lab that was established at a small university in response to that situation. The Teaching Lab aimed to both support non-native English speaking faculty who will be teaching content subjects to Japanese students while utilizing English, and to encourage more teachers to use English in their content courses. The political and educational challenges and limitations experienced in the first year of the Teaching Lab are explained in detail.

近年、日本の大学において、英語による専門授業の数が増えつつあり、当大学においても、第二外国語として英語を学習している学生に対し、英語で専門授業を行う教員をどのように支援すればよいかを検討している。本論文では、こういった状況に対応するために設立された「ティーチング・ラボ」を評価する。ティーチング・ラボの目的は、英語で授業を行う教員に対する支援や共通語として英語の使用頻度をあげることによって、英語をひとつの日常言語として浸透させることである。ラボ設立以来1年間で経験した組織的あるいは教育上の問題や弱点を中心に議論する。

ENGLISH MEDIUM content classes are becoming more common at Japanese universities. As part of the worldwide trend towards Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) (Stewart, Sagliano & Sagliano, 2002), more schools are adopting English for Academic Purposes in language classes. Furthermore, many English medium content classes are taught by non-English language teaching faculty members who are perceived to have the necessary English abilities. This raises an interesting issue. Though content-teaching faculty have the specialist knowledge and English proficiency to teach in English, teaching students who are also second language (L2) users of English raises particular challenges. Despite having been L2 learners themselves, the content-teaching faculty may lack understanding of the needs of L2 learners and the techniques required to accommodate them. This study reports on early stages of one interdisciplinary curriculum development program, the Teaching Lab, designed to support content-teaching faculty members with English medium classes.

In this paper we will initially highlight Content and Language Integrated Learning and its development in Japan, competencies for teaching second language learners, and interdisciplinary collaboration between language and content teachers. We will then describe the context

of this study, the reasons for the implementation of the Teaching Lab, and evaluation of its effectiveness.

Content and language integrated learning

CLIL refers to a wide range of programs that involve language and content learning. Bentley (2010) describes a range of CLIL programs beginning with language classes that exploit content, moving on to content based instruction models, and finally moving on to full immersion education models.

Figure 1. A range of possible L2 medium instruction models (adapted from Bentley, 2010).

In recent years, CLIL has become particularly popular in Europe where it is an established methodology applied to a variety of second languages (Zarobe & Catalan, 2009). In Japan, CLIL is not yet widely studied but there are many programs that can be seen as falling within the CLIL framework. In particular, a number of universities offer English medium courses, which could be classified as full or partial immersion. A Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology poll showed that as many as 46% of universities offer content courses in L2 (MEXT, 2004). MEXT (2009) clearly supports this trend and a recent position paper states:

> … it is very important for Japanese universities to conduct not a few [sic] lessons in English or to develop courses where students can obtain academic degrees by taking only lessons conducted in English. (p. 15)

It is clear that English medium content courses will continue to increase at the university level in Japan and, it is likely that universities will request their Japanese faculty members to take on the bulk of these courses.

Teaching second language learners

Success in L2 medium classes and success in both content and language learning is not simply a case of having a content specialist faculty member competent in the target language. This is necessary but not sufficient. In early studies on immersion programs, Swain (1988) shows links between poorly implemented L2 medium classes and lack of student progress in both content knowledge and language development. Genesee (1994) shows that teacher preparation and administrative support for the programs are key to the success of immersion programs. In discussing L2 medium classes following the CLIL approach, Meyer (2010, p. 13) says that simply teaching in the L2 "does not automatically lead to successful teaching and learning."

Meyer (2010) suggests that if teachers are not aware of CLIL methodological competencies, the positive effects of such learning situations may be compromised. This implies the need for faculty members teaching those classes to develop new approaches to education. Research on L2 medium education tends to be based in the fields of education and applied linguistics; therefore the expertise generally rests with language teachers. On the other hand, the content specialists have expertise in discipline specific content and pedagogic norms. Schools, and thereby students, may therefore benefit from an interdisciplinary collaboration between the content specialists and language teachers.

Interdisciplinarity

Klein (1996) talks about interdisciplinarity as a relationship based on sharing ideas. However, achieving this "cross-fertili-

zation" (p. 4) is often difficult. Even in the best case scenario, interdisciplinary relationships in education require participants to cross boundaries and work in what Lemert (1990) calls "shadow structures", unclear zones between disciplines where cooperation may be problematic because participants' ideas about curriculum and communication are different (Heintz & Origgi, 2008).

According to Reid (1992) views of curriculum generally fall into one of two models. The first is "curriculum as institution" (p. 7), where the culture and academic norms of the discipline and the scope of the content define the curriculum. The actual processes of learning and teaching are not prioritized. In the second view, "curriculum as practice" (p. 7), the focus is on the actual process of learning and teaching. The curriculum is not defined by content but rather by the teachers' repertoire of techniques and the students' learning experiences. Courses in the curriculum as institution model are often seen to have higher status, and faculty associated with those courses often have more authority in school affairs.

Arkoudis (2006) suggests that, in most cases, content courses are seen as "curriculum as institution" where content drives the curriculum. However, language courses, including EFL, are often perceived as strategy rather than content driven and so are seen as "curriculum as practice." This leads to unequal power relationships between the two groups of teachers. Content teachers have higher status and more claim to authority in pedagogical discussions. This contributes to the "rough ground that at some times can separate ESL and mainstream teachers as they attempt to plan curriculum together" (Arkoudis, 2006, p. 415). This is further compounded if the institutional hierarchy marginalizes language teaching, as is often the case in Japan (Adamson, 2010).   In the Japanese context, other obstacles to interdisciplinarity also exist. Takagi (2002) discussed the resistance to collaboration of many Japanese teachers. Professional development in Japanese universities tends to be based on personal reflection rather than collaboration (Okano & Tsuchiya, 1999; Sato & Kleinasser, 2004). In addition, Japan can be seen to have an academic culture with a strong tradition of what Freeman (1994, p. 3) calls frontloading in which "a single sustained professional input early on in teachers' careers is assumed to equip recipients for a lifetime of professional work."

Context of the study

The current study is based in a small university located in a mid-sized city in Northern Japan. The school has recently changed from a two-year junior college to a four-year university and is undergoing major curriculum renewal, including plans for English medium instruction in some classes for second and third year students. The use of English as a language of instruction was strongly advocated by the planning committee. This met with skepticism by much of the faculty. However, a CLIL-type approach was maintained as a distinctive feature of the university's new character and this is used in advertising the university to prospective students. The new intensive first-year English program, named *Academic Communicative English*, specifically aims to prepare students for the rigors of taking specialist courses in English. These developments have served to enhance the status of English within the curriculum. A by-product is that some other faculty members may perceive their own specialties as being implicitly less valued.

The students in the program are working towards degrees in International Studies and Regional Development. After the students complete the semi-intensive English for Academic Purposes program, they move into English medium content courses.

It is at this critical stage that the Teaching Lab provides support for the faculty members taking on responsibility for the English medium courses. These content courses are to both give

students understanding and knowledge of content and aid in the improvement of their L2 capabilities.

Teaching Lab

The Teaching Lab functions to support the curricular goals of the university. The Teaching Lab consists of a group of seven full time faculty members (three native English speaking foreign language teaching specialists and four non-native English speaking content specialists) and a part-time Teaching Lab assistant. It is positioned inside the Multicultural Literacy Program that is funded by a Good Practice grant from the Ministry of Education and works in conjunction with the Faculty Development committee of the university. The aims of the Teaching Lab are to provide support for faculty members who are planning to utilize English in their classes, and to generally promote the development and expansion of English medium courses.

Functions of the Teaching Lab

The Teaching Lab was established with two functions in mind. Firstly, it was intended to be a research body with two foci. Teaching Lab members look into L2 medium programs at other universities, both in Japan and internationally, to guide decision-making internally. The group also gathers data regarding developments of our university's L2 medium program.

Secondly, the Teaching Lab working group seeks to support faculty members involved in the L2 medium program. This support includes a mentoring program where content faculty with concerns about their language proficiency can be shadowed and supported by a member of the language-teaching faculty. There is also a Teaching Lab support center staffed by a part-time language-teaching faculty member. This person supports content faculty in their overall curriculum design and day-to-day lesson planning through providing insights into how students

are likely to respond to given content in English, advice on structuring materials to maximize uptake and thoughts on how the wider body of literature on L2 medium instruction can be applied to this particular situation.

The Teaching Lab also invested considerable time and energy in preparing Teaching Skills Workshops for faculty members who plan to teach using English. These workshops were intended to pass on classroom techniques that it was felt could be of use in aiding both the uptake of content and the linguistic output of students in L2 medium classes. Workshop topics included the current English capabilities of the students, the main needs of students working in an L2 context, and a Public Policy lecture open for observation and discussion. Further workshops are being considered on topics including helping students develop critical thinking skills, multiple intelligences theory, languaging and translanguaging and course design.

Evaluation of the Teaching Lab and discussion

Evaluation of the Teaching Lab's initial impact will focus on the two aims that were initially envisioned as functions for the Teaching Lab: supporting faculty members who are incorporating English into their content lessons, and promoting the expansion of English medium classes at the university. Though the support for faculty has proven effective in some areas it has not been as wide reaching as intended. The part-time Teaching Lab assistant has not been approached as often as had been expected for assistance in preparing course materials. More discouraging however, the members of the Teaching Lab have not been able to effectively encourage the expansion of English medium classes. It was initially hoped that close to 1/3 of content courses would be taught utilizing English to varying degrees. Currently, the ratio is lower. The reasons for this limited impact in both areas may be connected to the Teaching Lab members' inability to foresee the difficulties mentioned above in interdisciplinary

collaboration as well as symptomatic of the way in which the curriculum innovations were introduced.

The Teaching Lab as a faculty support service

As mentioned above, support for faculty who are utilizing English in content classes is available in three ways: a mentoring system, a support center and part-time support person with language teaching expertise, and the Teaching Skills Workshops.

The first mode of support, the mentoring program, has not been utilized yet by any faculty members. The second mode, the staffed support center, is interacting effectively with some content teaching faculty members, however, at the time of writing only a small percentage of faculty members who taught using English have taken advantage of the service.

As for the Teaching Skills Workshops, the first workshop focusing on the current capabilities of the university's students, was well attended and, in the words of one participant, "eye-opening". Other workshops, however, have not been as successful. A workshop on the main needs of L2 medium students was seen by the presenters, in hindsight, to be overly simplistic and was possibly not timed well. Without providing elaboration on the pedagogical background of the students' mental processes during learning, the techniques suggested, such as review and scaffolding, appeared self-evident rather than compelling. Furthermore, through subsequent conversations with participants, it became clear that at the time of the workshop, most of the faculty had not yet begun to teach their lessons in English and so might not have felt the need for such advice.

The third workshop, a lesson open for observation and discussion, had some difficulties in that it was put on in collaboration with the Faculty Development committee. The publicity for the event, the following discussion, and final evaluation were all organized by the Faculty Development committee, and the Teach-

ing Skills Workshop's aim of encouraging discussion concerning the use of English in content classes was not the main focus of the event. Also, while the lesson itself was well attended, the discussion was poorly attended. Finally, the lesson was misconstrued by the Faculty Development committee and reported as an experiment in the area of combining language and content rather than as an example lesson. In light of these experiences, the Teaching Skills Workshops have been suspended pending a re-envisioning of their role in the wider Teaching Lab.

Teaching Lab and the promotion of English medium classes

It was hoped that the Teaching Lab would aid in ensuring that English medium content courses were adopted as a significant part of the new four-year curriculum. However, it is evident through discussions with faculty members that the move in this direction is still challenging. One reason for the Teaching Lab's limited impact may have been a lack of clarity regarding its role. The Teaching Lab exists only to support faculty members and gather information. It does not have the authority to act as a decision making body. In discussions with regular Teaching Skills Workshop participants, concern was expressed that the ideas raised during the workshops had little impact on curriculum development. Decisions about which classes to teach in English and how to approach them were beyond the Teaching Lab's purview. In addition, the members of the Teaching Lab may not have been sufficiently sensitive to Japanese faculty members' reticence to engage in interdisciplinary collaboration in connection to faculty development, as mentioned earlier.

An additional factor may have been related to the previously mentioned perceived gap in authority between content and language teaching faculty members. Eckert and Wenger discuss the idea of legitimacy as a core element imperative to promoting

successful change in a community of practice. For them "legitimacy … involves not just access to knowledge necessary for 'getting it right', but being at the table at which 'what is right' is continually negotiated" (2005, p. 583). Without this kind of legitimacy, access to decision-making circles, an innovation is likely to fail. In the case of the Teaching Lab, the language-teaching faculty providing the bulk of the input and support may have been seen as lacking in legitimacy due to their focus on curriculum as practice. The materials and techniques offered in the workshops may also have focused too much on practice to be taken seriously by faculty members working in a curriculum as institution framework.

In addition to legitimacy, Eckert and Wenger (2005) suggest that the roles of people involved in innovation and their positions in the community play an important part in the success of an innovation. They discuss innovators, early adopters, and information brokers. Innovators often straddle communities and bring ideas from one context to another. In the Teaching Lab context, language teachers were bringing ideas from the literature on Applied Linguistics and Education into a discipline specific, content focused context. Innovators are generally seen as peripheral members of a community since members who are in a more central position are often invested in the status quo and are less likely to innovate. However, if the early adopter is too peripheral, the innovation will not spread. This may have been the case with the Teaching Lab.   Early adopters are also important. These are people whose enthusiasm for the innovation could become infectious. They have relatively strong ties to the community (so the innovation will likely spread from them to other members) but they are not the central members. In this case young, dynamic faculty members that were hired as a result of the transition to a four-year university filled the role of early adopters. Since the new university had content courses conducted in English as major components of the curriculum, many of the new faculty members have extended experience abroad and are very proficient in using English for their professional purposes.

One key position can be seen as not having been filled. The Teaching Lab did not have an information broker, someone on the periphery of the community but still a respected voice who could give tacit approval to an innovation. This person is usually not seen to have a personal stake in the success of the innovation and this neutrality gives weight to their approval. In the case of the Teaching Lab, all of those voicing approval for the English medium program were seen to have a vested interest in its success.

A paradoxical interpretation of the positioning of the Teaching Lab

In the above sections, the different status of content specialist faculty and language teaching faculty was suggested as a possible source of difficulty that may influence how the Teaching Lab is received by the wider faculty. Specifically, since advice from English language teaching faculty in the Teaching Lab has not been listened to or acted upon, it has led to a sense of marginalization amongst those innovators. Paradoxically, the issue of language education was thrust, by the administration rather than the faculty members themselves, to the very forefront of a variety of areas of the new, four-year university, including curriculum design, marketing of the university and entrance examinations. The university has marketed itself as an institution that emphasizes both English language classes and English medium education. The first year of the curriculum devotes one third of its compulsory classes to English language education, and has now produced a sizable number of students expecting to have content courses that utilize their English capabilities. This positioning of English language education has possibly led some content teaching faculty members to feel the integrity of

their subjects has been compromised by the transition to a four-year university.

In the current situation, English is allotted a central position. At the same time, the English teaching faculty members who are working to support the development of English medium content courses through the Teaching Lab are feeling marginalized due to their ineffectiveness in reaching the content teaching faculty and promoting the development of English medium courses.

In summary, the effectiveness of the Teaching Lab is currently challenged by both a top-down over emphasis on English language education and an inability on the part of the English language-teaching faculty in the Teaching Lab to effectively be heard by the wider faculty. Thus, the Teaching Lab has been unable to help with a smooth transition to English medium content courses having a more solidified role in the curriculum.

Implications for further work

The study described here has taken place over approximately one year and illustrates the difficulties in making internal efforts to promote curricular innovations especially with regards to collaborative efforts to develop English medium content courses. As the Teaching Lab moves forward, we must seek to reposition it within the university community.

Deeper integration with existing Faculty Development programs may promote a more regularized institutionalization of the program leading to more legitimacy of its aims. In such a case, however, it will be necessary to have effective communication with the Faculty Development committee regarding the aims of such collaboration. Furthermore, the members of the Teaching Lab have also recognized that previous attempts to promulgate the language teachers' expert knowledge and curriculum of practice represented a unidirectional transdiscipli-

narity rather than true interdisciplinarity. To promote true interdisciplinarity, more needs to be done to foster the relationships between content and language teachers. In addition, Teaching Lab members have to take care to acknowledge the value of the knowledge and discipline specific expertise that content faculty members bring to the discussion. In that light, the Teaching Skills Workshops are expected to be restarted with an invitation to content teaching faculty to inform language-teaching faculty about their expectations of students in order to inform decision-making in the English for Academic Purposes program.

Conclusion

English medium content programs are a growing trend in Japan. It seems clear that an institution implementing such a program could benefit from interdisciplinary collaboration between its content and language faculty members. Such collaboration could draw on both the curriculum as institution approach of content faculty and the curriculum as practice approach of language teachers to create a synergistic whole. The current incarnation of the Teaching Lab did not succeed in becoming a true interdisciplinary collaborative space. However, the path forward is clear and the Teaching Lab will continue to make adjustments to ensure movement in the right direction.

Bio data

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