

Language—The Secret to Success

Much ink and wind have been wasted on the topic of how Liberal Arts should respond to the global market. Here in Japan, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has even gone so far as to call for the virtual abolishment of Liberal Arts programs. On 14 September 2015, *Times Higher Education Magazine* reported that Japan's Abe administration had called for the closing of liberal arts and social science faculties at national universities in June to promote "more practical vocational education that better anticipates the needs of a society." Yet what prepares young people for the global market and vocations better than a thorough education in a second language? For it is through the study of another language that students come to understand both the mechanics of their mother tongue and the importance of learning another method to express themselves. I would even go so far as to say that it is through the study of a second language that students prepare themselves for the global market.

The study of language forms the foundation on which all success in the global market depends—if an individual is incapable of listening to others or interpreting written messages, it will be impossible for him or her to interact with people from other countries. Thus, without the skills of listening, reading, writing, and speaking in a language, a student's participation in the global market, let alone any domestic endeavors, would be impossible.

Therefore, as English teachers here in Japan, we must work on ways to help our students polish these four skills in language learning. First, comes listening. In order for Japanese learners of language to comprehend spoken English, it will become more necessary to increase their exposure to native pronunciation and the pronunciation of other English speakers. This can be accomplished best by employing native English speakers in schools, but if this is impractical, making the most of current technologies will become necessary, and the greatly shunned smartphone in academic environments, I feel, can become an indispensable tool for learning English, as it literally puts learning at students' fingertips. Imagine how useful the Murphy English Grammar books as an audio-enhanced English application would be!

Next comes writing. To develop writing skills, it is important to learn English grammar. *English Grammar in Use* by Raymond Murphy is one textbook that provides concise explanations and thorough exercises for acquiring good grammar skills. The other good point to *English Grammar in Use* is that it has many helpful vocabulary and phrases that are short and simple and can be used in actual communication. The adoption of texts such as this is key to fostering English skills in communication.

Students must then put all of these skills together to speak and express their opinions. One way to do this is through the creation and execution of presentations. To motivate students to perform these kinds of tasks, students will need to read and understand English and interact with students from other countries. One example of how this could be done is through empowerment programs that foster both opportunities to speak in English and gain confidence in speaking a second language.

I had my high school students join a program where we invited university students studying at institutions like Cambridge and Oxford to Japan. The university student's role was to lead a group of 5 or 6 high school students to think deeply about things and express their opinions using English. In order to participate in every lesson, students were given homework assignments, such as reading a passage or watching a TED talk. If they didn't do their homework, they were barred from joining discussions. In every class, high school students were instructed to present and explain their opinions. It was a five-day program from nine in the morning until three in the afternoon with a well-trained Canadian facilitator guiding the university student leaders.

During the program, students actively took part in discussions, in single and in group presentations. At the end of the program, each student made a final presentation in front of the class. The students all looked very confident and you could see that they enjoyed talking in English. Seeing first-hand the changes that this program brought about, I realized that any student of a second language must not only work hard to master the language but also needs experience in learning how natives express themselves and just what the idiom of using another language is. I now strive to find methods of adapting these activities in my daily lessons through the assistance of native teachers at my school. Because if students do not understand that the language they are learning is a dynamic and living method of actual communication, it will be difficult for them to realize the importance of their studies.

As you can see, what I believe are the necessary skills for Japanese students succeeding in the global market are all inherent in learning a language. If schools do not produce students who are able to read, listen, write and speak, they are not equipping them with the skills necessary to contribute to their own society, much less a global one. Being able to anticipate social trends, keep one's ears open to topical discussions, and possess the ability to express opinions and creativity will help students deal with the ever-changing global market and apply their abilities to new opportunities that will help them succeed most in the future.