

## **2010 Report on the Puan Program: How did student-teachers' beliefs about language learning and pedagogical skills evolve after a two week teaching practice in Thailand?**

**James M Hall**

### **1. Introduction**

The Puan Program <sup>1</sup> is a two week English teaching internship at a Thai secondary school for English Department students of Iwate University. In Thailand, secondary schools consist of the equivalent grades of Japanese junior and senior high schools. This paper will briefly introduce the Puan Program and its goals. Next, it will introduce 4 students who participated in the program in January 2010, and show how their pedagogical skills and beliefs about foreign language learning and teaching evolved during the practicum. Finally, based on the results, this paper will make suggestions about how the program can be improved. This paper is written for students who are interested in participating in the program, as well as to serve as a reference for other educators who have similar programs, or would like to institute such a program.

### **2. An overview of the Puan Program and the local teaching environment**

The Puan Program was started in 2003 by Iwate University and Siam University, when students from the English Department went to the Bangsai Witthaya School in Ayutthaya (Thailand) to participate in a two week teaching practice. Since 2003, Siam University in Bangkok has introduced schools to the English Department, and has also overseen the teaching practice when student teachers are in Thailand.

The national curriculum of English education in Thailand stipulates that schools focus on the *Four Cs*. These are

- Communication skills
- Connection of English with other subjects
- Community: use English in and outside school
- Culture: understand the culture of other countries

---

<sup>1</sup> The word "Puan" means friendship in Thai.

Unher, Yamazaki, and Hall (2008) note that English education in Thailand tends to be more flexible than in Japan; although the goals of the curriculum are decided by the Thai Ministry of Education, there is no textbook authorization *per se* as there exists in Japan. Thus, schools design their own syllabi as well as choose their own teaching materials to accomplish these goals of the *Four Cs*.

The English Department student-teachers go to Thailand to teach aspects about the Japanese culture in English. It is hoped that this will be mutually beneficial to both the Japanese student-teachers and Thai students. First, it is hoped that this teaching practice will help the Japanese student-teachers develop their practical teaching skills and English language skills. Second, it is hoped that the Japanese student-teachers' classes can help Thai schools carry out the *Four Cs*, in particular by exposing their students to aspects of the Japanese culture firsthand through such contact with the Japanese student-teachers.

Regarding the *Four Cs*, because the common language that the Japanese student-teachers share with the Thai students is English and not Thai or Japanese, classes are conducted only in English. Needless to say, the only linguistic means Thai students have to communicate with the Japanese student-teachers is English. Thus, one can see how this might correlate with developing students' communication skills, i.e. the first "C." One can also see how the Japanese student-teachers' teaching of the Japanese culture and interacting with the students can relate to the other goals: understanding the culture of other countries, using English inside and outside of school, and connecting English with other subjects.

## **2.1 The participating schools**

In 2010, the cooperating schools of the Puan Program changed to the Stri Wat Absornsawan School and the Wat Nuannoradit School. Both schools are located in Bangkok and are about an 8 minute walking distance from each other. These schools are also located about 2 kilometers from Siam University.

Stri Wat Absornsawan is an all-girls school, while Wat Nuannoradit is coeducational. Stri Wat Absornsawan employs 107 teachers, 17 of whom teach

English. Of these English teachers, three are foreign nationals who are native speakers of English. The school also offers classes in Chinese, Japanese, German and French. Wat Nuannoradit, on the other hand, employs over 100 teachers, of these 15 teach English. They also employ an additional four English teachers from other countries. Aside from English, Wat Nuannoradit offers Chinese language classes.

In Thailand, school grades are called *Matthyom*. In both schools each *Matthyom* consists of 10 homerooms and each homeroom has 40 or more students. Thus, each school has a student body of over 2400 students. Stri Wat Absornsawan and Wat Nuannoradit are academic high schools and many of their students attend university after graduating.

## 2.2 The teaching environment of the schools

As mentioned earlier, the Japanese student-teachers went to Thailand to teach students aspects of the Japanese culture. Before going to Thailand, I sent the supervising teachers of both schools an e-mail asking them to confirm that the topics the Japanese student-teachers planned to teach were acceptable. I received the following response from the head of the English Department at Wat Nuannoradit:

I like the topics that you have sent to me..... Don't worry about teaching grammar or pronunciation because my students study it every day. I think they want to study different topics and want to exchange the opinions with your students who are of the same generation. Anyway your students can teach grammar and pronunciation when they exchange the opinions.

About the Wat Nuannoradit students' English ability, the teacher wrote:

Some of my students have a high English ability and others have rather less ability but they are good students and I guess they are interested to study with your students. Some classes can discuss or speak English very well. I will consider and divide my students to 3

types (good, fair, less ability ) and your students can teach every type.

Because a key component of the Japanese student-teachers' classes is interaction between the students and teachers in English, I will briefly discuss how conducive the teaching environment is for this endeavor. As the teacher mentions above, students' English ability depended on the class and this was true for both schools. It was my personal experience that some students were very interested in Japan and enthusiastically asked many questions about Japanese pop culture, the Emperor, the weather, school life, etc. Personally, the kinds of conversations that I had with the Thai students about Japanese culture and I saw the Japanese student-teachers have with the Thai students were intellectually stimulating as well as personally fulfilling. This type of experience was something that I had rarely witnessed in a typical English classroom in Japan. In this sense, the environment was conducive for the Japanese student-teachers to teach about Japanese culture as well as have discussions about it.

Now, I would like to briefly discuss elements of the environment that

**Figure 1:** A classroom at Wat Nuannoradit



served as obstacles to teaching and discussing about Japanese culture. First, typical classrooms had shuttered windows which were always open and no doors. Because of this open environment, the teacher must talk over the noise coming from the other classrooms as well as the school courtyard. Figure 1 shows a classroom at Wat Nuannoradit. Most classrooms are equipped with microphones for the teachers but the microphones were sometimes broken. When the microphone was broken, it could be very difficult for the teacher to speak above the noise. It should be noted that there was a special language teaching classroom in both schools that had glass doors, windows, AV equipment and air conditioning. Thus, doors and windows could be closed and there was minimal noise coming from outside.

Second, depending on the class, in both schools student noise from within the classroom could be hard to control. While in some classes students eagerly listened and participated, in other classes students could easily become distracted. A foreign-born English teacher from Stri Wat Absornsawan said that students could easily stray off task doing group work and that he usually did pair work. At one of the schools, I observed students texting, doing other homework, preparing pompoms for their field day, and sleeping during group work. One foreign teacher at Wat Nuannoradit said that the students tended to be quiet when Thai English teachers taught because the classes were teacher-centered and in Thai. However, he said that students tended to treat classes that emphasized communication as opportunities to take a break and socialize with friends. As I did not have a chance to observe the classes of Thai English teachers, I cannot corroborate the thoughts of the teacher. Nevertheless, this phenomenon concerning how English classes in Asian

**Table 1:** Sample time table for Japanese student-teachers at Stri Wat Absornsawan

<b>Period</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Time</b>	8:30- 9:20	9:20- 10:10	10:10- 11:00	11:00- 11:50	11:50- 12:40	12:40- 13:30	13:30- 14:20	14:20- 15:10
<b>Tues.</b>	Class				Class	Class	Class	
<b>Wed.</b>		Class		Class				Class
<b>Thurs.</b>		Class	Class				Class	

contexts often suffer a breakdown in student behavior when teachers try communicative language teaching has been documented by Littlewood (2007).

The last obstacle is scheduling. Table 1 shows a time table for two Japanese student-teachers at Stri Wat Absornsawan School. As can be seen, there is no time between classes, which means that they do not start on time. This was true for both schools. Thus, 50 minutes of class time was, in reality, about 40. However, if teachers planned to teach for 40 minutes instead of 50 then they can soon adapt to the schedule. At one school, however, I frequently observed students coming into class well after it had started. These students had missed so much of the class that they could not follow it and this presented a substantial challenge to the teacher to keep all the students focused on the class.

In summary, in both schools many students could be considered eager to communicate with the Japanese student-teachers and participate in class. However, there were also a number of students who were less enthusiastic about participating and student willingness to participate in classes would vary significantly depending on the class.

### **3. Areas of investigation: Pedagogical skills and language beliefs**

Nagamine (2008), in his investigation of the beliefs of Japanese pre-service English teachers, justifies his study by discussing what he perceives as a weakness in English teacher education in Japan. He writes that teacher education focuses on students' pedagogical knowledge, e.g. knowledge about foreign language teaching, and subject matter knowledge, e.g. knowledge about the English language, English speaking culture, etc.. However, many EFL teacher education programs "employ traditional approaches based on 'the knowledge transmission model' (Nagamine, 2008, p.8)," and do not consider how novice English teachers become good teachers nor give them the individual support they need to improve their teaching.

Despite EFL teacher education's emphasis on pedagogical knowledge and subject matter knowledge, Yonesaka (2004) in her literature review of the cognitions of Japanese pre-service teachers writes that many pre-service teachers have insufficient subject matter knowledge, little basic pedagogical skills and conflicted beliefs about communicative language teaching.

What are ideal pedagogical skills for teachers? Yonesaka (2004) suggests that one way to uncover the pedagogical skills that novice teachers need is to compare their actions to experienced teachers. Richards, Li, and Tang (1995, cited in Yonesaka, 2004) used the following four dimensions to explain the differences between novice and experienced teachers:

**1) Learning to think about the subject matter from the learner's perspective:**

Experienced teachers can anticipate problems that students might have and predict how they might react to an activity.

**2) Acquiring a deeper understanding of the subject matter:** For example, an experienced teacher might produce plans with linguistic objectives for a reading class if they recognize certain language that will be helpful for the students. Pre-service teachers, on the other hand, might devote the class exclusively to reading.

**3) Learning how to present subject matter in appropriate ways:** Experienced teachers produce detailed and varied plans about how to present material in a way that will catch the interest of the students. Pre-service teachers produce plans with little detail or variation.

**4) Learning how to integrate learning with broader curricular goals such as cultural understanding, values clarification or personal reflection:** In a reading class the experienced teacher might relate the reading to broader themes while the pre-service teachers will focus only on the meaning of the passage.

Why should we focus on teacher's beliefs? Richards and Lockhart (1996, p.29) write that "what teachers do is a reflection in what they know and believe." Thus, changes in teachers' beliefs might also relate to changes in the way that they teach. Also, erroneous beliefs about foreign language teaching and learning can have a detrimental effect on teaching because EFL teachers' beliefs are closely linked with their teaching.

Yonesaka (2004) argues that reflective activities for pre-service teachers can refine their beliefs about foreign language teaching and learning and help them reconstruct their knowledge base. Citing previous research, she also provides evidence of reflective activities such as teach and re-teach and

reflective writing before and after a practicum that appeared to change pre-service teachers' beliefs about foreign language teaching and learning.

It can be argued that the Puan Program addresses the weakness that Nagamine discusses as well as encourage the type of reflective practice that Yonesaka advocates. It is the Puan Program's goal to help students improve their pedagogical skills and competency in English through a process of teaching, feedback, reflection and re-teaching. Thus, in this paper I will hypothesize what kind of effect this experience had on the teachers' pedagogical skills and beliefs about foreign language teaching and learning.

#### 4. Method of investigation

From January 4 – 16, two female student-teachers taught at the Stri Wat Absornsawan School and two male and one female student teachers taught at the Wat Nuannoradit School, all from our English Department at Iwate University. The student-teacher information is in Table 2, and pseudonyms are used to protect their privacy. Etsuko, Taro and Shota had already completed a 4-week elementary school teaching practicum in Japan that third-year students are required to complete, as well as three EFL teaching methodology courses. Naomi had completed one EFL teaching methodology course and had yet to undergo her 4-week teaching practicum as she was not a third-year student. Naomi and Etsuko team-taught classes at Stri Wat Absornsawan while Taro and Shota team-taught at Wat Nuannoradit.

Sandra, from Pakistan, also joined the group. She had been an experienced high school English teacher in her home country and was spending a year at Iwate University as a visiting researcher. Thus, in her teaching situation English was the medium of communication in the

**Table 2:** Student-teacher profiles

Teacher	Gender	School	Course at University	Grade
Etsuko	Female	Stri Wat	Elementary School	3
Naomi	Female	Absornsawan	Elementary School	2
Taro	Male	Wat Nuannoradit	Elementary School	3
Shota	Male		Elementary School	3
Sandra	Female		Visiting Teacher	-



classroom. As this study is focusing on the effect the Puan experience might have on Japanese pre-service teachers, Sandra will not be included in this investigation.

Before and after the teaching practicum the Japanese student-teachers were asked to complete a Teacher's Beliefs Inventory which was adapted from Johnson's (1992) study of the language learning beliefs of 30 ESL teachers which appeared in Richards and Lockhart's (1996, pp. 48 - 49 ) *Reflective Teaching in Second Language Classrooms*. Table 3 shows the questionnaire teachers answered. They were asked to choose 5 statements that best reflected their beliefs about language learning from a list of 15 statements. Pre and post practice responses will be compared to surmise how this practice might have affected student-teacher's beliefs about foreign language teaching and learning.

**Table 3:** Pre and post practice questionnaire

Read the following statements concerning how English as a Second Language is acquired and how it should be taught, and choose five statements that reflect your ideas most closely. Fill in the numbers of those statements. (   ) (   ) (   ) (   ) (   )

1. It can be said that language is a grammar system learners learn consciously and that learners should control the grammar system.
2. If a student understands when s/he says something in a target language, it can be said that s/he has acquired the target language.
3. It is useful to correct a student's error on the spot and to give them a few minutes to explain why the error was made.
4. A learner can be said to have acquired the target language if s/he listens to its native speaker speak, practices it, and memorizes it.
5. Generally speaking, a student needs to know rules of English grammar in order to be a fluent speaker of English.
6. When students make mistakes in speaking English, it is useful to give them enough practice on the language patterns on which students make mistakes in speaking.
7. As language is a communication activity including meaning, it can be acquired not by the conscious learning in the formal education but by unconscious learning in their daily lives.

8. If students acquire basic English grammar rules to some extent, mostly they can create many sentences.
9. Generally speaking, it is more important to teach English with a focus on what to say than a focus on how to say it.
10. If a student practices the language patterns of native speakers of the target language, s/he can create new sentences, based on the language patterns s/he acquired.
11. It is important to present grammatical structures clearly and repeatedly in an English class.
12. Language is an action system in which learners acquire the target language through many drills and practices on native speakers' language patterns.
13. When your student makes a mistake in speaking English, it is a good idea to ignore the mistake as long as you can understand what s/he is saying.
14. Generally speaking, students should acquire basic skills concerning 'speaking' and 'listening' before starting to learn 'reading' and 'writing'.
15. In fact, it is not necessary to teach 'speaking' because they begin to speak naturally when they are ready to speak.

To consider how the pre-service teachers' pedagogical skills might have changed, I will describe how the lessons of Etsuko and Naomi as well as Taro and Shota evolved. While I primarily observed the classes of Taro and Shota, Mr. Takeshi Hatakeyama, a high school English teacher in Morioka who participated as a co-researcher in the trip to Thailand, observed mostly the classes of Etsuko and Naomi. The teachers also kept diaries describing their teaching practice and a post-practice discussion was also held to confirm how their approaches to teaching changed. Using the researchers' field notes, video recordings of the classes, and teachers' diaries and notes from the discussion, I will describe how their pedagogical skills evolved.

## **5. Changes in the pre-service teachers' beliefs and pedagogical skills**

The teachers had between 2 to 4 classes a day and taught students from all grades. In both schools the first day of class was devoted to observing English classes mainly taught by the foreign teachers. On the second day, the teachers were scheduled to observe classes but were ultimately asked to teach

some classes. By the third day the teachers had a full class schedule. Table 4 shows the themes on which the teachers based their classes. It should be noted that Etsuko and Naomi also assisted with Japanese classes at Stri Wat Absornsawan. The most frequent theme covered by Taro and Shota was *Japanese ghost stories* while that of Etsuko and Naomi was *Seasons*. In the rest of this section I will attempt to show how each groups' teaching of the most frequent themes evolved by examining them through Richards, Li and Tang's (1992) dimensions of 1) Looking at the class from the students' perspective; 2) Understanding the subject matter; 3) Presenting the material in a motivating way; and 4) Integrating the content with broader goals. After that, I will examine how their beliefs changed before and after their teaching practice.

**Table 4:** Classroom themes of the student-teachers

Student-teaching group	School	Classroom themes
Taro and Shota	Wat Nuannoradit	Japanese ghost stories, origami, school life in Japan and Thailand
Etsuko and Naomi	Stri Wat Absornsawan	Seasons, School life in Japan and Thailand, Japanese language

### 5.1 Changes in Taro and Shota's pedagogical skills

For their ghost story class, Taro and Shota prepared three stories to tell students: 1) "Slit-mouth woman" (*Kuchisakeonna*), 2) *Mujina*, 3) *Hanako-san*. However, they soon realized that three stories were too many for one class and told two stories per class. The basic structure of their class is shown in Table 5.

**Table 5:** The outline of Taro and Shota's ghost story lessons

1) Self Introduction
2) Warm-up: "What's this?" quiz (3 – 4 questions)
3) Two Ghost Stories
4) Conclusion

The self introductions consisted of Taro and Shota talking about themselves and introducing where they were from, Iwate and Shizuoka respectively. After this, they would play a warm-up game called the “*What’s this? Quiz*.” In this quiz, one student would come to the front of the class and face his classmates. The teachers would hold a picture behind the student who was called to the front of the class and the rest of the class would give him hints as to what the picture behind him was. When the student guessed what the picture was he could sit down. Among the pictures given by Taro and Shota were a banana, refrigerator, blackboard, mirror, and ghost. The last word led into the ghost stories in which Taro and Shota would tell two ghost stories from the original three that they prepared. An activity would then follow each story. For the conclusion they would ask students about their impressions or which story was scarier.

In the first several classes Taro and Shota struggled to keep the students’ attention while they were telling the stories. Furthermore, it was hard to hear them speak because more students seemed to be socializing with each other rather than participating in the class. For a January 7 class on *Mujina*, Taro and Shota performed the *Mujina* story and then handed out a print of the story to students so that they could act it out. However, because many students did not understand the story that Taro and Shota had performed, they could not do the task. As a result, Taro and Shota made several changes to the way they presented the story to encourage them to listen. Shota said that at first they were showing the ghost story only using words and body language and this was not sufficient for students’ understanding. They made changes to the way they introduced the story, by making more pictures and pointing to the pictures as they spoke.

During and after telling a story, Taro and Shota tried various activities throughout their two weeks at Wat Nuannoradit. These activities included: 1) Taro and Shota stopping their performance at a climactic moment and asking a pair of students to act out what they think happens next; 2) Students reading the story in groups after Taro and Shota’s performance and then one group reading in front of the class; and 3) Students organizing the lines of the story into their correct order after Taro and Shota’s performance. Taro and Shota first tried role-play but they came to the realization that “role-play was

not so interesting for the students,” and experimented with other methods such as students organizing the lines of the story. Furthermore, the first time they asked students to organize the lines they realized that there were too many for the students to arrange so they reduced the number. The above indicates that Taro and Shota experimented with different ways to present material and began to think of the class from the students’ perspective.

However, in my observations, I saw no evidence that Taro and Shota had a deep understanding of the subject matter as they did not attempt to exploit language learning opportunities in the text. For example, Shota and Taro did not pre-teach words or practice language that appeared in *Mujina*.

Additionally I did not find evidence that they tried to relate the content of the learning to other curricular goals in my observations, review of their lesson plans and journals and my interview of them. For example, could listening and understanding the story not only introduce children to a popular Japanese story but also help them practice listening skills or listening strategies which they need for learning English? How did this class relate to the aforementioned *Four Cs*?

## **5.2 Taro and Shota’s beliefs about foreign language learning and teaching**

Table 6 shows Taro’s top 5 beliefs about language learning before and after his teaching practice in Thailand. Before going to Thailand, two of the 5 top beliefs, 1 and 5, touched on the importance of grammar teaching and did not change. Also, before going to Thailand, one belief that he chose, number 7, stipulated that language can be learned unconsciously through daily life. After returning from Thailand, however, four of his top 5 beliefs touched on the importance of learning grammar and the last one, number 12, emphasized the importance of drills. Taro commented that his thinking about the importance of grammar changed drastically because students’ writing was “filled with a lot of grammatical mistakes that even I can notice.” According to Taro, quite often grammatical mistakes made students difficult to understand.

**Table 6:** Taro's top 5 beliefs before and after the Thai teaching practice**Beliefs that changed**

- 3) It is useful to correct a student's error on the spot and to give them a few minutes to explain why the error was made. **(Before)**
- 7) As language is a communication activity including meaning, it can be acquired not by the conscious learning in the formal education but by unconscious learning in their daily lives. **(Before)**
- 10) If a student practices the language patterns of native speakers of the target language, s/he can create new sentences, based on the language patterns s/he acquired. **(Before)**
- 8) If students acquire basic English grammar rules to some extent, mostly they can create many sentences. **(After)**
- 11) It is important to present grammatical structures clearly and repeatedly in an English class. **(After)**
- 12) Language is an action system in which learners acquire the target language through many drills and practices on native speakers' language patterns. **(After)**

**Top 5 beliefs that stayed the same**

- 1) It can be said that language is a grammar system learners learn consciously and that learners should control the grammar system.
- 5) Generally speaking, a student needs to know rules of English grammar in order to be a fluent speaker of English.

In a similar vein, before going to Thailand, only one of Shota's top 5 beliefs about foreign language learning, number 11, covered the importance of grammar (See Table 7). However, after his teaching practice two of his top 5 beliefs, numbers 4 and 11, mentioned grammar. Additionally, before going to Thailand, Shota believed that it is best to ignore a student's mistake (number 13), but after returning he thought it is useful to correct the student's mistake on the spot (number 3). When asked to elaborate on his apparent changes in beliefs, Shota said he thought that students "did not know grammar and its basic rule to speak fluently and correctly," and thus it is important to focus more on grammar.

**Table 7:** Shota's top 5 beliefs before and after the Thai teaching practice

<b>Beliefs that changed</b>
2) If a student understands what s/he says in a target language, it can be said that s/he has acquired the target language. <b>(Before)</b>
7) As language is a communication activity including meaning, it can be acquired not by the conscious learning in the formal education but by unconscious learning in their daily lives. <b>(Before)</b>
13) When your student makes a mistake in speaking English, it is a good idea to ignore the mistake as long as you can understand what s/he is saying. <b>(Before)</b>
3) It is useful to correct a student's error on the spot and to give them a few minutes to explain why the error was made. <b>(After)</b>
6) When students make mistakes in speaking English, it is useful to give them enough practice on the language patterns on which students make mistakes in speaking. <b>(After)</b>
15) In fact, it is not necessary to teach 'speaking' because they begin to speak naturally when they are ready to speak. <b>(After)</b>
<b>Beliefs that stayed the same before and after</b>
4) A learner can be said to have acquired the target language if s/he listens to its native speaker speak, practices it, and memorizes it.
11) It is important to present grammatical structures clearly and repeatedly in an English class.

### 5.3 Changes in Etsuko and Naomi's pedagogical skills

**Table 8:** The outline of Etsuko and Naomi's lesson on seasons

1) Self Introduction
2) True or False Quiz on Japan
3) Show and discuss pictures of the four seasons
4) Group discussion: <i>Which season do you like?</i>
5) Conclusion

Table 8 shows an outline for the lesson of Etsuko and Naomi's most frequently covered theme, seasons. After their self-introductions, Etsuko and Naomi gave 8 statements about Japan and asked the students to guess if they were true or false. (It should be kept in mind that the Thai climate is most

often hot, or hot and rainy, and as such, students' first-hand experience with other types of weather, such as snow, is often non-existent.) Their last question was whether or not Japan had four seasons and this led to the introduction of the topic, Japanese seasons. After introducing the topic, Etsuko and Naomi showed students various pictures from the four seasons and explained the pictures. The pictures featured various activities for each season. Table 9 shows the pictures they displayed for each season. After this, Etsuko and Naomi asked students to make groups and discuss which season they liked the best.

**Table 9:** Pictures Etsuko and Naomi used to introduce Japanese seasons

Spring	Summer	Autumn	Winter
The Doll Festival ( <i>hinamatsuri</i> )	The beach	Moon viewing	A snow hut
Cherry blossoms ( <i>Sakura</i> )	Fireworks ( <i>hanabi</i> )	( <i>tsukimi</i> )	( <i>kamakura</i> )
	The Sansa Dance ( <i>sansa odor</i> )	Autumn leaves ( <i>momiji</i> )	Winter scenery

During their first class, Naomi and Etsuko observed that the students were not talking during group work. For the second class they decided to teach students the following key sentence to help them say which season they liked the best:

I like <sup>season</sup> \_\_\_\_\_ because <sup>refer to a picture</sup> \_\_\_\_\_.

Another reason why the group discussions did not work was because the students did not understand the pictures. For example, for autumn Etsuko and Naomi showed a picture of the moon for moon viewing (*tsukimi*) but students were not aware of the custom of moon viewing. Thus, the teachers realized that they would have to explain the pictures, not only present them. A third reason why group work was problematic was because, as a foreign-born English teacher from the school elucidated, “sometimes group work does not work with some students.”

To encourage more students to participate, Etsuko and Natsumi used a technique they saw their supervising Thai teacher perform. For this technique,



the teacher would ask a student, “What season do you like?” The student would answer using the key sentence and then ask another student what season they liked.

Etsuko and Naomi’s change of how they presented the pictures indicates that they made progress in presenting new material. Furthermore, their introduction of a key sentence into the group discussion indicates that they might have started to acquire deeper understanding of the subject matter, in that they were able to exploit opportunities for language practice. Lastly, their varying the way they conducted activities based on the characteristics of the learners shows that they started to think of the class from the learners’ perspective. As with Taro and Shota, there is no evidence that Etsuko and Naomi were able to integrate the learning with broader curricular goals.

5.4 Etsuko and Naomi’s beliefs about foreign language learning and teaching

Table 10: Etsuko’s top 5 beliefs before and after the Thai teaching practice

Beliefs that changed
12) Language is an action system in which learners acquire the target language through many drills and practices on native speakers’ language patterns. (Before)
14) Generally speaking, students should acquire basic skills concerning with ‘speaking’ and ‘listening’ before starting to learn ‘reading’ and ‘writing’. (Before)
5) Generally speaking, a student needs to know rules of English grammar in order to be a fluent speaker of English. (After)
9) Generally speaking, it is more important to teach English with a focus on what to say than a focus on how to say. (After)
Beliefs that stayed the same
7) As language is a communication activity including meaning, it can be acquired not by the conscious learning in the formal education but by unconscious learning in their daily lives.
8) If students acquire basic English grammar rules to some extent, mostly they can create many sentences.
10) If a student practices the language patterns of native speakers of the target language, s/he can create new sentences, based on the language patterns s/he acquired.

Table 10 shows Etsuko's top 5 beliefs about language learning before and after the teaching practice in Thailand. While three beliefs stayed in her top 5 before and after participating in the teaching practice, two beliefs changed. Notably, her belief that students should first acquire basic skills concerning speaking and listening was not in her top 5 after the teaching practice. On the other hand, the belief that students need to know the rules of grammar to be a fluent speaker of English was in her top 5 after the practice. Of this, Etsuko commented that before going to Thailand she did not think grammar was very important, but after returning from Thailand she felt it was very important

**Table 11:** Naomi's top 5 beliefs before and after the Thai teaching practice

Beliefs that changed
7) As language is a communication activity including meaning, it can be acquired not by the conscious learning in the formal education but by unconscious learning in their daily lives. <b>(Before)</b>
10) If a student practices the language patterns of native speakers of the target language, s/he can create new sentences, based on the language patterns s/he acquired. <b>(Before)</b>
12) Language is an action system in which learners acquire the target language through many drills and practices on native speakers' language patterns. <b>(Before)</b>
13) When your student makes a mistake in speaking English, it is a good idea to ignore the mistake as far as you can understand what s/he is saying. <b>(Before)</b>
15) In fact, it is not necessary to teach 'speaking' because they begin to speak naturally when they are ready to speak. <b>(Before)</b>
3) It is useful to correct a student's error on the spot and to give them a few minutes to explain why the error was made. <b>(After)</b>
4) A learner can be said to have acquired the target language if s/he listens to its native speaker speak, practices it, and memorizes it. <b>(After)</b>
5) Generally speaking, a student needs to know rules of English grammar in order to be a fluent speaker of English. <b>(After)</b>
6) When students make mistakes in speaking English, it is useful to give them enough practice on the language patterns on which students make mistakes in speaking. <b>(After)</b>
11) It is important to present grammatical structures clearly and repeatedly in an English class. <b>(After)</b>

because “a little difference can affect the [understanding of] sentences.

Naomi's beliefs, displayed in Table 11, changed more drastically than those of Etsuko as all of her top 5 beliefs changed after the teaching practice. Of her top 5 beliefs before the teaching practice, none mentioned the importance of grammar. After her teaching practice, however, two beliefs, numbers 5 and 11, touch on the importance of grammar and another two, numbers 3 and 6, mention the importance of targeting students' errors. Naomi commented that before going to Thailand she thought that “correcting mistakes interferes with communication.” However, in Thailand she realized that correcting mistakes was important and the students did not mind being corrected. Furthermore, she mentioned that student errors in grammar when speaking, e.g. “Are you want to east ice cream?” made her realize the importance of learning grammar structure.

## 6. Conclusion

A description of the teachers' classes shows that they made modest strides in planning a class from the students' perspective and learning to present subject matter in appropriate ways. However, not as much progress was evident in acquiring a deeper understanding of subject matter and relating the content to broader curricular goals. I would like to emphasize that the responsibility for this lies more with the supervisors, particularly the author, than the student-teachers. As the goal was to teach about Japanese culture, using the material to also teach students language was not sufficiently addressed. In order to learn and talk about Japanese culture, Thai students will also need to learn new language. For future teaching practices, the importance of showing the Thai students linguistic tools they can use to understand the Japanese student-teachers' presentations and discuss them should be emphasized.

In order for the teachers to relate the content of the class to broader curricular goals, or *The 4 Cs*, support from the Thai teachers at both schools is essential. As Thai teachers understand the curricular and school goals, it is they who can provide the Japanese student-teachers with this advice.

Secondly, regarding the teacher's beliefs, they seemed to change to a heightened awareness of the importance of grammar and a lowering of the

merits of communication. Interestingly, in previous practices at the Bangsai Withthaya School we had seen the opposite tendency. That is, teachers would be more positive about the importance of communication after completing the practice. I would like to surmise what the factors for this change could be: 1) Teachers had mixed results in conducting communicative activities; 2) Grammatical mistakes by students in speech and writing made it difficult for the teachers to understand them.

Comparing my observations between classes at the Bangsai Withthaya School and the current two schools, at Bangsai, the Thai teachers accompanied the Japanese student-teachers for all the classes, provided advice afterwards, and intervened and assisted them when communicative activities did not work well. It is my belief that more assistance by the Thai teachers can help the Japanese student-teachers attain greater success in conducting communicative activities. Having more success in conducting communicative activities might help Japanese student-teachers see that both communication and grammar are essential for learning languages.

## **7. Recommendations for improvement**

Although this paper has devoted significant space to addressing some problems in the teaching practice, it is important to note the overall success of the program. Shota, Taro, Etsuko and Naomi were very popular among students and teachers at their respective schools. The primary reason why their class load was so heavy was because their teaching was in demand. After this experience, both schools were eager to host more student-teachers from Iwate University. To conclude this paper, I would like to propose how to improve this teaching practice in the future.

First, before going to Thailand, our Japanese student-teachers need to learn more communicative activities designed for large groups and plan beforehand the linguistic tools they will need to enable students to participate in the activities. Second, before going to Thailand, the classes the Japanese student-teachers will teach should be decided beforehand and they should know which of these classes consist of advanced learners and which consist of learners not so strong at English. Third, Japanese student-teachers should be assigned a Thai teacher mentor(s) before going to Thailand. They should send

their lesson plans to the teacher and get comments before going. Fourth, when the Japanese student-teachers teach, their mentor should provide them with advice afterwards and intervene in the class if necessary. Also, mentors should help the Japanese student-teachers with class management such as encouraging students to stay on task or making sure students come to class on time. Fifth, the mentors should provide advice to the Japanese student-teachers about what kind of broader goals their lessons need. Sixth, the Japanese student-teachers should have two full days of observation and they should observe Thai teachers' classes as well as the foreign teachers' classes. Seventh, the maximum number of classes Japanese student-teachers teach in a day should be limited to three, and they should be provided time to write in their journals during the day and discuss their lessons with each other and the Thai teachers, so they can better reflect on their practice.

## References

- Johnson, K. (1992). The relationship between teachers' beliefs and practices during literacy instruction for non-native speakers of English. *Journal of Reading Behavior*, 24, 63 – 108.
- Littlewood, W. (2007). Communicative and task-based language teaching in East Asian classrooms. *Language Teaching*, 40, 243-249.
- Nagamine, T. (2008). *Exploring Preservice Teachers' Beliefs*. Sarbrücken, Germany: VDM Verlag Dr. Müller Aktiengesellschaft & Co. KG.
- Richards, J.C. and Lockhart, C. (1996). *Reflective teaching in second language classrooms*. Cambridge, UK: CUP.
- Richards, J., Li, B. and Tang, A. (1995). A comparison of pedagogical reasoning skills in novice and experienced ESL teachers. *RELC Journal*, 26(2), 1-24.
- Unher, M., Yamazaki, T., and Hall, J.M. (2008). Japanese College Students' On-site Teaching Practicum in Thailand. *東北英語教育学会研究紀要*, 28, 37 – 48.
- Yonesaka, S.M. (2004) Teaching What, to Whom, How and Why: A Review of Pre-service Japanese ELF Teacher Beliefs. *Hokkai Gakuen University Studies in Culture*, 29, 19 –36.