

The Japan-United States Teacher Education Consortium (JUSTEC)
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JUSTEC 2012大会について

Jason White, Himeji High School
Email: jayinhimeji@gmail.com

Many foreign language teachers in Japan have heard of the Japanese Association of Language Teachers (JALT) and the Japanese Association of College English Teachers (JACET), but recently I discovered a similar group that consists of educators from both the US and Japan called the Japan-United States Teacher Education Consortium (JUSTEC). JUSTEC was established 24 years ago and was originally designed as a three-year project, but through the efforts of its members, and a few key figures in the Japanese and US education systems, JUSTEC was able to continue, and has now developed into a thriving organization dedicated to the advancement of education in both countries. The 24th Annual JUSTEC Conference was held at the Naruto University of Teacher Education in Naruto, Shikoku from July 6th-9th. The conference featured keynote speakers and discussants from the United States, Japan, Thailand, and Korea. The main session began Friday afternoon with Dr. Donna Wiseman, Dean of Education at Maryland University, giving her plenary address.

Dr. Wiseman spoke about the two current schools of thought regarding teacher training and licensure in America. She described the two schools as being traditionalists and reformers. The traditionalists are those who believe teacher training should remain rooted in university education programs that require anywhere from four to seven years of education and training, whereas reformers believe in alternative licensure programs that can be completed in a much shorter time period. For traditionalists the main goal is to equip new teachers with the knowledge and skills that will enable them to make a smooth transition into the classroom and be effective teachers in today's rapidly-changing global society. Conversely, the reformers believe that education should focus on promoting student performance on standardized tests. According to reformers, the best way to promote student performance is by filling classrooms with new teachers who can succeed in this aim as quickly as possible. Traditionalists understand that every student is an individual and that some students will not perform well on standardized tests regardless of intelligence or ability.

Traditionalists believe that students learn in different ways, and that teachers should treat them accordingly. Dr. Wiseman's presentation gave the overall impression of a warning against the ideals being put forward by the reformists. I tend to agree with the traditionalists' ideals because I believe one of the most important factors in overall student success is the influence of a quality teacher, and the reformists' method of truncated training and student test score-based teacher evaluation are detrimental to the development and retention of quality teachers.

There are an increasing number of programs in place today that implement the reformers' alternative licensing ideals, such as Teach for America (TFA), where high-performing recent

college graduates, regardless of academic subject area, are recruited and trained in only a few months and then placed in schools in low-income and rural communities for a two-year term. Regardless of effectiveness, many TFA teachers leave after their initial contract period and are replaced by new recruits.. Conversely, the traditionalists are more concerned with the long-term goal of growing education as a profession by investing time and resources to train and retain quality teachers.

Dr. Wiseman was followed by Dr. Katsuyuki Sato from the host University who spoke about the state of teacher training and development in Japan. Dr. Sato expressed the belief that there is a divide between teacher training programs and effective classroom teaching. He discussed two main problem areas: insufficient consensus among professors regarding curriculum, and a conflict between knowledge of subject content and practical ability. Dr. Sato outlined the somewhat limited training that teachers receive in Japan as one of the main causes of unprepared or underqualified teachers, citing specific weaknesses such as the inability to give quality lessons or maintain student interest. He went on to discuss the changes that are needed in the Japanese education system, such as an increasingly specific curriculum and training that provides a more focused skill base for Japanese teachers, although he did not discuss in detail any specifics about the curriculum or the skills that teachers should be taught.

Dr. Fred Hamel from the University of Puget Sound in Washington spoke next. He discussed the new trend in America for teaching licensure called Teacher Performance Assessment (TPA). Currently 25 states in the US have adopted the TPA standards for preservice teachers. A few highlights of the TPA are more in-depth self-evaluations from the teacher candidates, including 40-50 pages worth of written self-evaluations, videotaped lesson delivery and evaluation, and close contact with mentor teachers throughout the program. The teacher candidates are also required to pay \$300 to an independent evaluating company for grading of certain required tests that the candidate must take during the teacher training process. I was amazed at the amount of time and effort that is required of preservice teachers, and my final thought on the subject was to wonder if the TPA program is so demanding as to actually discourage some potentially high-quality teachers from entering the profession.

Dr. Kim from Gyeongin University of Education spoke next, followed by Dr. Narumol Inprasitha from Khon Kaen University in Thailand. Both speakers discussed education and teacher licensure in their respective countries. One interesting point from Dr. Kim's presentation was that the social status of teachers in Korea is fairly high and therefore teaching is a field that has an abundance of candidates, many of whom are unable to pass the difficult teacher training courses and exams required of future teachers.

The afternoon session ended with a lively discussion where many interesting viewpoints were expressed. One idea that stood out among the various topics was the popularity of homeschooling in America and whether it is a viable option in Japan. The responses to this idea were mixed, but the majority of responders seemed to believe that homeschooling would not work in Japan. One reason given was that, even if a child were successfully

homeschooled, society would not accept it as a proper form of education, which would greatly hinder the child's future prospects.

The conference continued on Saturday with an interesting list of short paper presentations on teacher education practices and contemporary issues related to education in the US and in Japan. I presented early Saturday on the topic of building a positive learning environment. I discussed my experiences of teaching high school students both in America and in Japan, focusing on strategies for increasing student motivation and performance that have worked well in my classes both in the US and in Japan. The response was very encouraging, and several attendees shared positive thoughts with me afterwards. Another presentation given by Eriko Fujita, a graduate student from Purdue University, and professor Hiromi Imamura, her mentor teacher from Chubu University, provoked a bit of a heated response in the ending discussion. The topic was incorporating World Englishes into English education in Japan. In her presentation Eriko made a powerful case for the autonomy of Japanese English teachers in Japan, citing reasons such as the high cost of importing Assistant Language Teachers (ALTs), the relatively short tenure (usually 2-3 years) of most foreign teachers, and the idea that Japanese teachers are more in tune with the feelings and reactions of their students because they share a common culture. During her presentation she also discussed the idea that Japanese students have self-perception problems relating to their accents and pronunciation of English words, which causes them to view native speakers as being perfect or better than Japanese speakers of English. This was a very interesting idea for me because I have not heard this concept expressed by either my Japanese high school or adult students, but it is something that I would be interested in researching further.

The last presentation of the day was a viewing of an entire videotaped fifth-grade science lesson in a Japanese public school. After the viewing, all the participants divided into groups and discussed the strong and weak aspects of the lesson, followed by a full discussion of the various group interpretations. This activity highlighted one of the key features of JUSTEC: the opportunity for comparative perspectives on education.

Sunday saw another group of paper and poster presentations, including presentations on loss of identity and the subsequent grief this caused adult returnees to Japan and on assessment portfolios for Japanese elementary school children.

The JUSTEC Conference was an enjoyable event that helped me to gain a stronger perspective on the state of education in Japan and the US. One aspect that I particularly enjoyed was the consecutive presentations which allowed all the participants to attend every presentation if they chose to. There was also ample opportunity for individual or small group discussions between each presentation. I was able to make some genuine connections with educators from all the countries represented at JUSTEC, and I am looking forward to attending this conference again in the future.