

Reflections on a Multinational, Heterogeneous, Philosophy Class

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Abstract: This self-analytical article illustrates the process of engaging a student body of mixed nationalities and language proficiencies in a Philosophy and Society course in the spring of 2014 at Otemae University. It reviews a 15-week journey and addresses various difficulties and successes creating a content-based course in English. In addition, it includes student reactions to their experience as well as the instructor's analysis of the course. There are two reoccurring themes throughout this paper. The first is the benefits of teaching a content course in a foreign language, particularly to Asian students who wish to master English. It supports the rationale that such courses offer language learners practical application of attained language skills in specific context in a real world setting. Secondly, this article argues that a content course, moreso than a traditional language course, in English promotes the development of stronger language ability to comprehend and express ideas. Furthermore, students are able to develop their abilities to independently draw their own conclusions on a variety of issues.

Keywords: content-based English instruction, philosophy and society, teaching mixed learners

要約

この論文は、大手前大学の2014年度春学期に行われた講義「哲学と社会」において、様々な国籍・語学能力からなる学生たちが講義にどのように参加したのか、そのプロセスを明らかにするものである。15週にわたる講義を振り返り、英語によるコンテンツ・ベースの講義の難しさやうまくいった点について記している。また、教員による分析に加えて、学生たちの反応についても触れている。

この論文では二つの論点が繰り返し登場する。ひとつは、特に英語を習得したいアジア圏の学生に対して、外国語で一般科目の講義を教えることの利点である。これは実世界における特定の文脈において獲得された語学能力を、実際に使ってみることは正しい方法であることを示すものである。二つ目には、英語で行う一般科目講義が学生たちの表現する能力を向上させることについてである。さらに言うならば、学生たちは様々な課題について自力で結論を導き出す能力を磨くこともできる。

キーワード：content-based 英語教育、哲学と社会、多様な学生を教えること

Course Description

The course was a late addition to Otemae's content-based Global Japan Studies program, which offers content classes taught in English. Heavy consideration was given to what materials to use and the English levels of the students. Locating a suitable textbook as an anchor for the course was difficult within the limited time frame allotted to prepare the course. Consequently, it was necessary to create original, authentic, and adaptable material for the course.

The class originally consisted of 29 multinational students with a large discrepancy in English proficiencies. Consequently, the first challenge was productively engaging with English levels that ranged from novices to native speakers. Of course, those who could not comprehend any of the content quickly dropped the course. However, many participants with low levels of English competency remained, leaving the task of simplifying the content enough for some to understand without compromising the quality of the course.

The success of the course also relied heavily on the relevance of the content to how students developed their own decision-making abilities in real life. It was important to make this class substantial so that students could engage with the material in a meaningful way. Without a text but with a deep desire to make the content pertinent, the course was structured into six areas of study that would teach some of the core basics of philosophy. At the same time it was paramount to have subject matter that was applicable to making decisions for issues that all students eventually encounter in life such as: self-esteem, criminal justice, raising children, education, euthanasia, death, and war. Such problems were worthwhile since they taught the students exactly how philosophy is exercised in real situations that they will face throughout their lives. Two to three classes were devoted to each of the following six areas of study:

1. Philosophy of Human Nature (Happiness, Truth): What makes a person truly happy?

In this part of the course, students were expected to come up with attitudes and non-material things that contribute to a happy life. The catalyst for the classes was a video presentation of a 17-year-old boy, named Sam Berns, who suffers from a disease called Progeria. After considering Sam's circumstances and his philosophy of happiness, students were required to come up with their own conclusions on how to live a happy life.

**2. Aesthetics (Defining Beauty, Entertainment): What makes a person beautiful or unsightly?
How do you judge between good and bad entertainment?**

The first segment dealt with identifying traits that make people either attractive or unappealing. The main activity divided the students into two groups that viewed different videos of the same person introducing himself in two different ways. Both groups came up with completely different assessments of the same person. Participants were then required to write about traits that constitute beauty to present the following week, followed by a debate on whether or not beauty contests should be banned.

The second part continued with a philosophical approach on how to judge art and entertainment and why they are important to society. Activities included rating art and music videos and gauging how opinions of others influenced one's own assessments. Students composed criteria for what makes good or bad entertainment and how they could apply it to their lifestyles.

3. Epistemology (Using Criminal Justice, Debate): How do you distinguish right from wrong and determine guilt or innocence?

Using epistemology in order to distinguish truth, the class conducted a case study on a homicidal crime. As detectives and juries, the class was required to define absolute facts and to weigh probabilities to convict the right person. An in-depth explanation of this activity is given later in this paper.

4. Philosophy of Religion (Why Bad Things Happen, Faith): Are bad life circumstances random, or is there meaning behind them? What is faith, and how do we all exercise faith on a daily basis?

The first part of this series addressed the reality of pain and injustice in life. Through interactive activities, students considered questions such as: Do things happen by random chance or by design? How do effort and free will affect the good and bad things that occur in life? Is a higher power responsible for unfairness? How do our own actions or inactions play into the courses of our lives?

The second part of this series covered the issue of faith and how people trust in the unseen on a regular basis. Students defined areas in their lives where they develop their beliefs independently and what they accept on faith from others. This theme will also be developed in depth later in this paper.

5. Philosophy of Society (Education, Raising Children): What qualities are essential to make a good parent? What should the extent of education be at home versus school and society?

Two weeks of dialogue centered on a film called “I Am Sam,” which depicted the life of a mentally handicapped, single father, who dealt with the challenges of raising his seven-year-old daughter Lucy. The class was split into two factions to debate the fate of the child. One group played the part of the NSPCC (National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children), which argued that the state and professional counselors knew what is best for the child, with the goal of removing Lucy from Sam. The other group consisted of lawyers who represented Sam and argued that he was the best parent for Lucy in spite of his disabilities. Students were then required to write a follow-up report of their convictions on the primary principles of good parenting and education in society and how to make them applicable to their own lives.

6. Philosophy of Society (Utilitarianism, Kantian Ethics - War, Euthanasia): When is war, if ever, justified? Who should determine the right for people to live or die?

The final area of philosophy was deepened through two lectures followed by student debate. The first discourse was on Kantian and Utilitarian Ethics, and the second on teleological and deontological theories. The student’s task was to discuss the strengths and weaknesses of each theory and use them to either defend or reject issues such as just war and euthanasia.

General Teaching Method

Assessment:

The main requisite for a passing grade was through participation and being prepared for class. The grading for the course was broken down as follows:

1. Portfolio (30%)

Weekly homework included extensive reading and viewing videos online. Students composed short essays for specific questions asked by the instructor. All assignments were kept in organized portfolios that were used during class discussion.

2. Mid-term Presentation (20%)

Group mid-term presentations required students to meet outside of class for research and brainstorming. Students were evaluated, in part by their peers, on how much they contributed to the project.

3. Final Paper (20%)

Students were given a choice to write on any one of the six topics covered throughout the semester. These papers were based on what they found to be the most momentous and how they came up with philosophical conclusions to issues that affected them the most.

4. Participation (30%)

Up to five points were awarded each week for those who arrived to class with their weekly assignments complete. These assignments enabled each student to actively participate in class and contribute to the classroom community.

Weekly Assignments Overview

It was of utmost importance to give weekly pre-class reading and writing assignments in order to lay the groundwork for each session. This was necessary since English was the second or third language for most students, and for many, the content of the class was not easily grasped. Accordingly, it was imperative that the learners arrived to each class equipped with some prior thoughts or knowledge of the subject matter to be covered in that day's course. They were therefore required to enter class prepared with some formed opinions in writing to contribute to group discussions.

Without a textbook, a typical assignment usually included an article that was composed from fragments of various publications (such as news and philosophy articles), online sources (such as teacher resource sites), mixed with the instructor's thoughts and questions. The articles were edited slightly above the average reading level of the class so that it would be challenging for some, yet not

too superficial for others. The reading was followed with various essay questions, typically requiring answers that ranged from one-hundred to three-hundred words each. In addition, the students were required to compose their own questions to ask their peers on the topic in class. These questions were purposed to fuel class discussion and enable even the lowest levels of English to engage in as much exchange as possible (Carlson & Tanaka, 2015).

The regular reading was a considerable time investment for the majority of students. The hard work bore fruit, however, as most were able to keep up with the pace of the class and contribute according to their ability. Moreover, students took responsibility for their own learning and achieved greater learning autonomy by constructing their own conclusions on a variety of issues.

The improved effort was reflected in a comparison between mid-semester and final portfolio evaluations. By the eighth week students were required to have written six entries for three topics in their portfolios: Philosophy of Human Nature, Aesthetics, and Epistemology. Assessment was done according to whether all sections were present and the amount of effort that had been put into the writing. At that time, the class-average grade for homework was a “C-minus.” By the end of the semester, however, the medium had risen to a solid “B” as students exerted greater resolution into completing their writing. Furthermore, the improved effort was also depicted in how students successfully completed their final papers which required a minimum 600-word essay. What many students thought to be unattainable for their English abilities became attainable through diligence and perseverance.

Creating an Active Classroom

With the homework generally laying the groundwork for each class, it was easy to set the subject matter in motion from the beginning. Class would start off with a short lecture, followed by an activity or two to illustrate the concepts at hand. These preludes were very helpful for three reasons: to make the topic appreciated, to enhance understanding for those with low English levels, and to create a vibrant class atmosphere.

One such activity addressed the topic of unexamined assumptions or blind faith while covering the Philosophy of Religion segment of the course. Comparing it to children believing anything a parent or teacher tells them, the class was asked, “How do you know that we breathe oxygen?” The only answer offered was that it is taught as fact. A number of further solicitations were made on beliefs and maxims that are normally accepted as true although they have never actually been seen or proven to them through their own independent perceptions. The contributions by the students included unseen things such as: time, love, the soul, Santa Claus, gamma rays, black holes, the ozone layer, the universe, and the belief that the very chairs they were sitting on would support them without breaking. The students concluded, therefore, that a multitude of things are believed as fact merely because

people either trust their natural instincts or have been taught so by somebody else.

At this point, two follow-up activities about faith were set into motion. First, the class was tested on using faith through their common senses through a simple illustration. A large balloon filled with water was exhibited along with seven sharp pencils. The group was asked what they thought would happen if the balloon was held over someone's head and the pencils poked through it. They unanimously agreed that the balloon would burst and the victim below would be drenched. One of the most reluctant students was then asked to sit under the suspended balloon while a pencil was punctured through it. The class hooted and squealed while the subject shut her eyes tight, bracing to get doused. To her relief and everyone's surprise, the first pencil went right into the balloon and through the other side without spilling a drop. The class was asked what would happen if the rest of the pencils were inserted. A number of people were still not convinced that the balloon would hold, so the procedure continued with six more pencils. Finally, there was a balloon with seven pencils protruding through it, and not one drip of water had leaked on the subject's head. It went against the class's collective common sense, but showed how some faith in their teacher's word was required to believe that no water would spill. This demonstration drew parallels to other beliefs and truths handed down and accepted by faith, generating a fresh dialogue throughout the room.

Second, the room was cleared of all desks and chairs, and about 50 balls were spread across the floor. The class was partitioned into two teams that selected four representatives for their teams in the upcoming activity. The chosen ones were blindfolded and instructed that the floor was a figurative field and the balls were allegorical mines. They were to walk to the other side of the room without stepping on a single mine lest he or she be metaphorically maimed or killed. It was their comrades' duty to guide them through the field by telling them where to step. In blind faith, the participants set out with a small sense of fear. The class became lively as they shouted out directions to their blindfolded teammates. Despite the confusion, noise, and moving balls, most of the blind slowly succeeded, through trust, to make it across the room unscathed. There was one, however, who failed in his mission to cross the room. Although there was plenty of laughter and some heckling, he felt somewhat let down and betrayed by his teammates.

Both the successful crossings and the one failure opened a wide door for discussion on whether there are times when it is necessary to blindly depend on what is told, taught, or seen through someone else's eyes. Furthermore, it also touched on other subjects such as the need to determine certain beliefs independently from others and the feeling of betrayal when disillusioned by those whom are trusted. Additionally, the balloon trick in the first exercise contributed to a dialogue on the role that science can play into faith and religion.

Overall, the class activities and illustrations yielded good results. Although the Philosophy of Religion was voted the least popular topic of the course, a written post-class survey revealed that on a scale between one and five, one meaning "boring" and five being "interesting", the class

average was a 4.6 for the day. When asked, “Did today’s class get you to think that the philosophy of religion is important to your life?” a remarkable 95.2% of the participants voted “yes” compared to previous “show of hands” inquiry that showed that over half of the class did not think religion was a relevant issue for their lives. A follow-up question asked, “Did this topic make you think of things that you have never thought of before?” 76.2% answered “yes” while only 23.8% thought otherwise. Furthermore, when asked if they had come up with some of their own, new ideas on religion, 71.4% responded in the affirmative. This survey revealed that non-native English speakers were able to acculturate into a communicative, philosophical class. Prior to the course, many, if not all, were still studying grammar and vocabulary. Straightaway, however, students of all English levels were comprehending new concepts and engaging in rational dialogue about the role that faith plays in religion, science, and everyday life.

Discussion and Peer Learning

Following a short discourse and some illustrative activities such as those described above, every class entered into extended discussion. One might think that this would be a difficult task for a class where the majority of the students were non-native English speakers, in particular Asian students. Typically, such students are used to a text-based learning environment and not usually accustomed to creating dialogue in a Western-style academic setting. In fact, the Japanese education system believes in systematic, regimented, teacher directed instruction (Sakamoto and Chan, 2006). Many would expect, therefore, that Asian students would hardly be well-equipped to participate in classes that involve active dialogue and debate. Such was not the case for this class, however, and there are three main reasons why this is worthy of attention.

1. Students were required to form answers to discussion questions *before* class.

To lay the groundwork for an interactive class, students arrived prepared by completing their homework assignments. The majority put a great deal of thought into forming their opinions beforehand and came equipped to answer questions that would be asked. Admittedly, there were often a small minority of students who arrived unprepared. Yet there were days when 100% of the class came fully prepared. Even if some participants arrived ill-prepared, the rest of the class was primed to generate stimulating and meaningful conversation each week, and depending on the topic, sometimes quite animated.

Students quickly realized that their portfolio entries were essential communication tools as they dispersed in to pairs or groups to re-engage with their homework in the classroom. Through small group discussions learners were able to put their own written ideas into effect, resulting in student-centered classes that internalized the content through sharing with others. Discrepancies in abilities were lessened as students collaborated with philosophical ideas based on their own thoughts. Capable

students supported the less adept, making complex content easier to comprehend. In essence, what unfolded was peer teaching. Through the act of teaching, students were able to consolidate what they had learned, leading to a deeper understanding of the concepts at hand (King, 2002).

Primed with pre-formed opinions, classes increasingly became student-driven. Substantial and memorable discussions took form since every person was provided numerous opportunities to participate. Through such engagement, students took multifaceted approaches to issues that were presented to them. Since no two viewpoints were identical, students had to consider the same issues from a variety of angles that did not naturally occur in them. This was a great asset to this multinational, heterogeneous class in particular, where the less people had in common, the more diverse their thoughts and opinions were. In essence every opinion mattered.

2. Interactive activities set students at ease with each other and integrated the classroom.

A variety of activities were continually used to aid the students to become better acquainted with each other. Being a heterogeneous class, they needed to break down barriers that prevented them from effectively interacting with each other. This was vital due to the chasms that sometimes exist between different nationalities, upper and lower classmen, and the sexes. Students tend to cling to people of their nationality, grade, or gender, often making it difficult for peers in any class to intermingle. For this reason, the class was often broken into small groups created through lotteries, card drawings, shooting targets; these activities served to integrate the student body in an entertaining way to help them develop good rapport.

Part of effectively blending the class was to capitalize on the six foreign exchange students who enrolled in the course. It was also imperative to keep shuffling up the groups so that everyone had a chance to interact with each other and prevent identical groups forming too frequently. For example, two circles were occasionally formed in the center of the room. There would be one inner circle and another outer circle with equal numbers of people in each. The inner circle people would pair up with someone from the outer circle and discuss a question from their homework assignments. After a determined time interval, the outer circle would be called on to step to the right, creating new pairs that would continue discussing the questions at hand. It is not a completely unique idea, but such activities continued to incorporate person-mixing and ice-breaking activities throughout the semester. Keeping a constant rotation undoubtedly helped erase the definitive lines between the members of the class.

3. Students were compelled to think beyond the boundaries of their normal thinking.

Once weekly assignments were consistently completed, integration established, and rapport built, the course could proceed to more complex topics. For a philosophy course, it was imperative to prompt students to think outside the box when they encountered weighty issues. In order to achieve

this, small groups or pairs were not merely asked to converge and discuss a homework question or topic. To invigorate dialogue the class members were arranged into juries, judges, legislators, and other such bodies. Not only did this create an energetic atmosphere, but it also encouraged valuable skills such as coming up with a group consensus.

One memorable example is when the class touched on the practice of epistemology, which uses what is known as facts and truth in order to reason and make decisions. While many courses might branch off into ontology and determining what things actually exist in the universe, this course took a practical approach by conducting two mock court cases in which the class had to determine innocence or guilt based on facts and truth. In one task, the class was presented a case where two American students were suspected of murder. Unknown to the rest of the group, one of the implicated was innocent, but would be coerced to confess to the crime and fabricate fictional stories about what happened. The other was guilty, but would adamantly refuse to admit to the crime due to fear of the death penalty. To add to the plot, a surprise witness would make false testimony against the guilty culprit. It would be up the rest of the class to convict the right person.

Prior to the trial day, students were instructed to prepare for two portions of the class. The first segment of time would be designated for all members to interrogate and extract evidence from the accused. The second section would be the actual trial, consisting of two defendants, one false witness, four judges, and the jury members. In a competitive spirit, participants invested more effort than usual outside of class to develop their roles. The arraigned meticulously formulated their defenses while the others entered thoughts and questions into their portfolios to use before the interrogations and the trial.

Throughout both segments of the activity, the defendants and the fictitious witness craftily lied, making it increasingly perplexing for the class to base their judgments on only truth and facts. An exhausting fifty questions were asked in an attempt to break down the defendants' alibis and find discrepancies in their testimonies. In the end, the judges and jury correctly identified the guilty culprit who was ceremoniously arrested with handcuffs and led away. It was a great sense of accomplishment to the students to have successfully weighed truth against fact and arrive at the correct verdict.

At the conclusion of the trial the students dealt with lingering questions such as: How do you determine absolute truth? Can you weigh what is probable against what is improbable, and draw a firm conclusion? Should hard penalties be given when the complete truth is not 100% certain? How would we feel if we sentenced someone to death only to find out later that he or she was innocent? How do you determine equitable penalties for certain crimes? Using utilitarian and Kantian concepts, such questions were discussed in length by the class, and varied conclusions resulted. Some groups determined that light retribution and rehabilitation was the preferred action because proof of the crime was not 100% absolute. Others demanded life-long imprisonment, or even the death penalty, claiming that the high probability of the crime heavily outweighed the improbability. Through the process, rationality and logical thought processes were manifested by those who use English as their second

or third language. For many, it was the first time that they used English as a means of acquiring information.

Activities like the mock trial were effective for several reasons. First, they compelled the students to occasionally argue both sides of certain issues. They were compelled to think imaginatively, using new ideas and arguing against some of their own convictions. Subsequently, many people revised their original views. Even more frequently, however, students were able to reconfirm and strengthen beliefs which they had already established prior to the course.

Secondly, such activities made the students significantly more engaged in decision-making processes. The best classes were when groups were eager to win their arguments and debates, even if they disagreed with the position that they were representing. Stronger students were able to pull up the weaker, providing involvement for those who struggled with the content and pace of the class. Conversely, the more capable students were able to consolidate what they had learned, which led to a greater understanding of their own ideas.

Thirdly, these exercises also provided excellent opportunities to capitalize on the camaraderie of the native English speakers. They were able to assume complicated roles that most others could not due to lower English levels. Their presence also provided their counterparts the chance to interact on a higher level of English. Not only were these enterprises highly entertaining, but the level of thought and dialogue was elevated.

Course Assessment - Challenges

There are three things that threatened to impede the progress in this course, and they are mostly related to language proficiencies and deficiencies. The first was that inevitability of some students having an insufficient knowledge of English for the course. The second was finding ways to keep the native-speaking exchange students motivated, and the third dealt with some students finding illegitimate shortcuts to get their work done.

The first deficiency has to do with English capability. As with other content-based courses offered in Otemae University's Global Japan Studies program, there was a large number of students who lacked the proficiency of English required to participate in a college level course. At the beginning of the program, participants were repeatedly informed that it was not an EFL/ESL class, but a content-based course. The message repeatedly stated that it was a course in philosophy, taught in English, and it would be very difficult to get through without a high comprehension of the language. Great measures were taken to encourage lower-level students to drop the course, and while some did choose to drop, some lower-level students chose to remain.

This resulted in a number of students struggling to survive the course. In fact, six students, comprising 20% of the class, failed to complete the course. Additionally, there were some who were unable to comprehend enough of the content of the course to succeed. Those who lingered tended to

rely heavily on their counterparts translating for them. Although it is not a transgression to revert to one's first language, relying on translation periodically slowed the progress of the class. Additionally, it became a distraction on a few occasions. This demonstrates the necessity for content courses to establish certain prerequisites in order to restrict the number of students with low English aptitudes.

Although it is best for the instructor and participants to use English as the common language to communicate, the use of languages other than English should not be necessarily forbidden in class. There are times when reverting to one's first language is unavoidable. Therefore, the policy for this course was, "Use English as much as possible, but it is acceptable to use your native tongue to seek the help you need, considering it supports the progress of others and does not get the class off track." It is meaningless if 100% of input is in English without letting people digest some of it in their own language. It does not help communication very much, if at all, for understanding meaning is the key to true communication (Weschler, 1997). Throughout this course there were certainly occasions when students reverted to their native languages to support each other. At some times it was a help, and at others it was a hindrance. Nonetheless, it should not be beyond the capabilities of any instructor to monitor any overuse of other languages.

The second difficulty to address was the task of keeping native English-speaking students motivated throughout the course. This posed a challenge; not only because the reading and writing assignments required less effort for them than others, but because they come from a culture that encourages strong opinions at an earlier age than their Asian counterparts. This does not imply that the Asian students were shallow in comparison. Rather, it means that many Asian students had never considered issues such as: defining beauty, finding criteria for being a parent, considering what constitutes happiness, how retribution works with justice, defining just war, the challenges of euthanasia, and more. Their American counterparts, however, had already thought about many of these issues to a certain degree and had developed various beliefs before enrolling in the course. This started out as a potential problem, and there was a lingering concern that the exchange students might not be stimulated throughout the term.

In reality, however, the imbalance provided a fantastic opportunity to upgrade the class. It was a great enhancement to have the western students share their already-formed, core beliefs with their Asian counterparts. The American students, in particular, shared their views with their peers, giving their new associates unfamiliar concepts to contemplate. At the beginning of the course the Asian students mostly listened to what the exchange students said. Toward the end of the term, however, there was a turnaround as Asian students engaged in strong dialogue with their American counterparts on heavy subjects such as war and the death penalty. In fact, four of the strongest final assignments came from Japanese and Korean students who came to powerful realizations on certain issues that they took to heart. A post-course survey revealed that 56% of the overall class felt they were able to debate well, and 35% said that they were able to debate to a satisfactory degree. Such results reveal

that the influence of the foreign exchange students played a major role in bolstering their Asian peers to come up with better conclusions than they would have otherwise. Their impact on the class was profound enough to say that their contribution clearly made the class a better experience for all.

Contrary to the concern that the foreign exchange students would under stimulated, the non-Japanese students gave the course high evaluations. On a scale between one and five, five being the uppermost, one of the Americans crossed out the number five and wrote in a “10” on the form. Another wrote that he made a new career choice as a result of taking the class. A Korean student said that she came up with stronger beliefs and was able to counter other people’s opinions for the first time in a third language. The outcome reveals that the course did indeed stimulate the language-competent students in spite of a constant concern that the content would be substandard to their English abilities.

Finally, the third deficiency of the class was a common problem of students finding delinquent shortcuts to complete homework assignments. Obviously, the homework assignments were a difficult task for many, especially for those with low aptitudes in English. Most of the students rose to the challenge and completed their assignments to the best of their abilities. A minority, however, took different tracks that did no justice to their learning experience. In fact, 13% admitted to doing less than what was required.

One example is that a small number of students simply wrote their answers in Japanese and then consulted Google Translate to convert them to English. It is common knowledge that Google Translate is not capable of translating in a very fluent manner. Consequently, a small number of assignments were turned in that were obviously “Googled” and made very little sense. Accordingly, students were frequently reminded not to use translating software as a tool to interpret whole passages, ensured that they would only be judged by the best of their abilities. As a consequence, no further unintelligible Google translations were submitted.

A more serious example, however, is that there were some isolated incidents of plagiarism. This did not seem to be a major problem throughout the semester; however, there were two special instances when it was obvious that the students had not done the writing themselves. In hindsight, such issues should be addressed at the beginning of the term rather than later. Since these occurrences happened at the very end of the semester, there was no opportunity to collectively address the class about the issue of copying other people’s work. Had this been dealt with at the start of the semester, the problem could have been avoided altogether.

A necessary step for instructors teaching content courses in English, therefore, is to first raise awareness among the students about plagiarism and give them more guidance from the outset. It is necessary to take some time for some systematic training on how to use citations and give credit where it is due. Teachers must deal with the fact that the concept of plagiarism is often unclear, particularly where the line is drawn between the students' own ideas and someone else’s ideas. It will be a service to them to eliminate any confusion about what is common knowledge and what are borrowed ideas

(Rinnert and Kobayashi, 2005).

Course Assessment - Conclusion

As mentioned at the beginning of this essay, one of the hardest tasks for a content course taught in English is to make the class content comprehensible for all. Teachers must avoid the two extremes of being either too easy or too difficult. Instructors must continually and dynamically strive for a meaningful balance between language and content (Snow and Brinton, 1997). If one gets too absorbed into thinking students cannot comprehend the content until they understand the language, he or she could end up teaching too much isolated language. Conversely, if one makes the content “supreme” and dismissed whether the students understood it or not, both the class and teacher will become non-communicative. For this reason, it serves well to compose the class assignments slightly above the average student’s level and make them exert some energy to understand it. With some amount of work, all learners can grasp the material and digest it.

Although it is nearly impossible for teachers to compose content to be perfectly equal for all participants, an effort to do so pays off despite the wide range of English levels and capabilities in their classes. It is crucial to make a classroom student-centered, spurring all the students, not only participate, but to internalize the material enough to form some of their own ideas, values, and conclusions. The most convincing evidence from this philosophy course was mentioned earlier; the average homework grades in the class rose between the middle and end of the semester. Students started devoting more time into their assignments and improved their grades as a result.

It is no small feat that English was used for philosophical discussion in a multicultural setting, predominantly between people who do not share English as their first language. The class became less fixed on linguistic accuracy and unconsciously more focused on communicative effectiveness. Apart from the native speakers, other good models of English usage emerged. This was reflected in the way that the Korean students, in particular, were the rising stars who ended up earning the best evaluations in the class. Moreover, some of the less language-competent students progressed significantly as they dedicated more time into their assignments. As a result, the overall intercommunication and inclusiveness increased throughout the course.

Such conclusions are echoed in other research of Asian student participation in western-like classroom settings. One analysis done at the University of Technology in Sydney claims that class participation and group work help Asian students to clarify understanding, giving them the opportunity to learn from others and gain better understanding of the content that they are dealing with. It helps to build speaking skills, assists in solving problems and questions, as well as making classes more interesting and enjoyable. Students are given the chance to improve English proficiency, better interact with the instructor and class, and get to know more people (Nataatmadja, Sixsmith & Dyson, 2007). Although completely different in content, it is no coincidence that this philosophy class precisely

mirrors other research.

Above all, this course offered the opportunity for many to develop a greater consciousness on different sets of real life issues. The methods that were used enabled the students to develop their own beliefs and values, empowering them to make new, informed decisions. As stated at the beginning of this paper, one of the ultimate objectives was to make this course relevant and memorable. The aim was to offer all participants the opportunity to stir up a greater awareness of crucial life issues, ultimately contributing to their own ideology and abilities to independently draw their very own conclusions. When 100% of the class confirms that they made new, personal opinions or reaffirmed beliefs, it shows that this goal was accomplished. Future classes and further reflection will certainly be required to enhance the overall content, but considering this to have been a pilot course, the class met the goals and in some ways succeeded beyond expectations.

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