



EFL TEACHING: FROM ALT TO TEACHING AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAMS

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English Learning Teaching Practices



BACKGROUND

- Assistant Language Teacher (ALT) in northern Japan 2018-2023.
- Placement included two elementary schools.
- Involved in lesson design, teaching lessons, materials development, and activities.
- Enrolled at Akita International University (2023).
- Part-time at a “gakudo” (after-school childcare program) from 2024.





WHAT IS A "GAKUDO"?

"Gakudo" (学童), short for gakudokyouiku (学童教育), is usually translated as "after school program".

After school, many elementary school children go to these after school programs if their parent(s) are still at work after school is finished.



WHAT DO CHILDREN DO?

While “play” is generally the central theme, depending on the program, activities can vary.

Some after school programs are adjacent to the elementary schools and publicly funded, so the programs may not be as particularly organized.

MY ALT ES CLASSES...

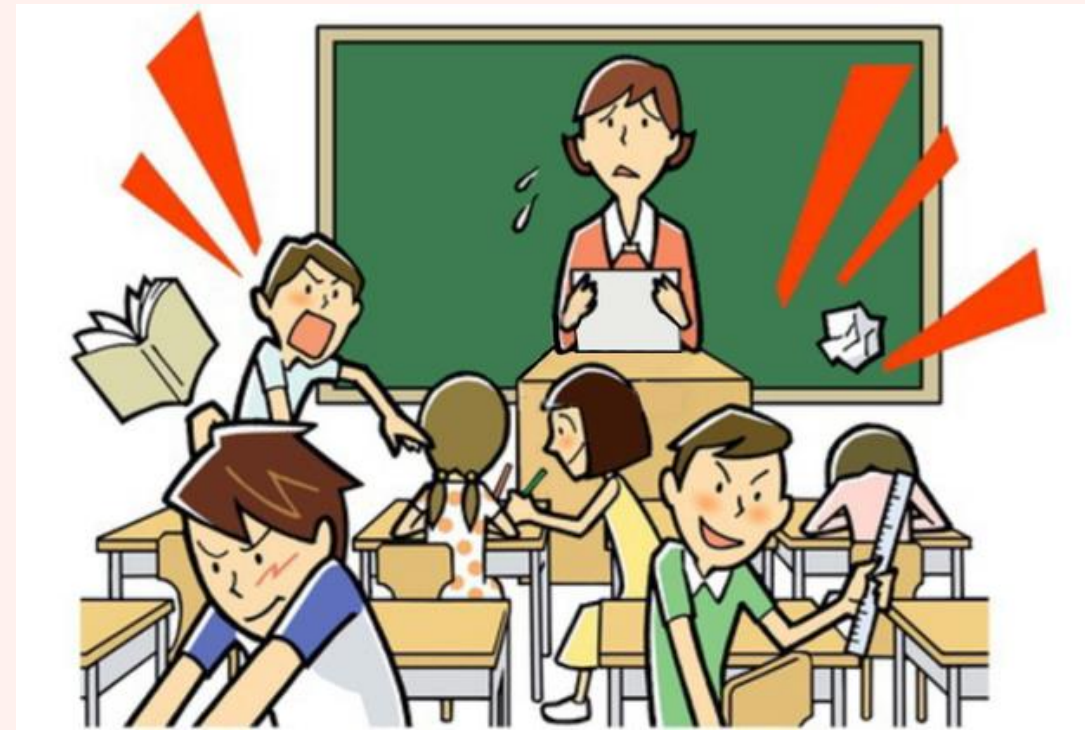
- Structure - school, behavior, class, lessons.
- Expectation of order.
- Homeroom Teacher (HRT) is the authority.
- ALTs just assist. Sometimes teach.
- Curriculum is set by BOE and school.
- Discipline can be stricter and expected.



MY GAKUDO CLASSES...

- Loosely structured. Schedules flexible.
- Order? What's that?
- No central authority given.
- Anyone can be the teacher.
- No set curriculum from the government.
- Discipline is generally relaxed...sometimes.
- Children don't want to study - it's not school!





MY CHALLENGES

- Children too shy
- Children too competitive
- Children who don't like drawing
- Children who don't like physical activity
- Children who hate studying
- Children that would rather write/draw
- Children who don't like creative things
- Children who don't see the point in practicing English
- Children that don't take gakudo workers like teachers
- Children who don't listen
- Children who are hyperactive
- Children who get discouraged easily, cries/tantrums
- Staff may not help because "they don't know English"

- Varying levels of motivation
- Varying levels of English skill
- Low attention span
- Discouraged easily, gives up quickly
- Can't stop talking to each other
- Shuts down any suggestion or activity
- Always vocally negative about lessons
- Disruptive behavior
- Refuses to understand "swearing" shouldn't be said
- Lessons may be canceled or changed due to inconsistent schedule
- Lessons can't be linear due to daily changing attendance
- Building skills difficult due to varying levels and attendance
- ...and many many more!

WHY STUDY?

One of the challenges for after school programs is that children, especially those in early elementary school do not have structured classes yet and are more focused on play than studying.

They want to **play**.





"PLAY?"



★ Play is emphasized because it keeps younger children active and engaged while being able to learn various life lessons.

★ Play doesn't have to feel like learning. Learning should be made to be like play. It should also be spontaneous.

★ Cognitive, social, physical, mental and emotional skills can be fostered through play. Language too!

★ If play is facilitated properly, children can have fun and learn at the same time.

★ Children learn through discovery as they try to figure out themselves, the world, and relationships with others.

★ Play shouldn't be guided by rules, rather the child should lead rather than the adult.

WHY SHOULD WE EMBRACE "PLAY?"

Students will misbehave, bend the rules, or we may be faced with a work-hostile environment.

Despite the challenges, play should be embraced for children.

If the students can't enjoy learning, then lessons become a chore for everyone, not just the students.

"Play" allows for freedom and discovery, for teachers and students. It's not just limited to early learners either.

Game-like activities are enjoyable and encourage participation. Curiosity and fun can create an interest in English (Shin, Savic, & Machida, 2021)



A NEW APPROACH

- Centering lessons around “play”, not points.
- “Fair” TPR activities.
- Task-based and content-based approaches.
- Learner autonomy where possible.
- “Discover” English.
- Provide milestones or accomplishments.
- Utilize their schemata.
- Lots and lots of positive feedback.





PLAY ISN'T JUST FOR YOUNG LEARNERS

JHS

-According to a JHS teaching in Arizona, USA: "I teach at a K-8 school, and when I look at these seventh and eighth graders, they're no different than the kindergarteners. They get excited when I bring out Play Doh and googly eyes."

--"Opportunities for play and playful learning tend to recede in middle school, replaced by direct instruction, competitive sports and tightly structured academic time." (Samuels, 2022)

-Students can still learn valuable social and critical skills through play.

SHS

-Play can be valuable in different ways for SHS students.

-“High school students are reticent about putting themselves out there, so we need to first create a safe space to explore ideas in “weird” ways, take risks, be vulnerable. They have to be able to see firsthand that yours is a space where judgment and criticism are reserved for growth-based feedback, not personal attacks.” (Bakkegard, 2024)

-It's also suggested SHS play should be conducted similarly to young learners: let the students lead play, taking reasonable risks.

<https://japannews.yomiuri.co.jp/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/9621371.jpg>
<https://gaijinpot.com/uploads/sites/4/2019/02/Kids-Running-Out-Lead-1024x684.jpg>

The Hechinger Report, 2022.


https://global-navi.metro.tokyo.lg.jp/files/278/000278/jet_sc_02_03.jpg
https://global-navi.metro.tokyo.lg.jp/files/266/000266/international_sc_03_02.jpg

Edutopia, 2024.


INTEGRATING "PLAY"

"Explore The Unknown"
"Lead Their Own Learning"
"Find Joy In Their Learning"

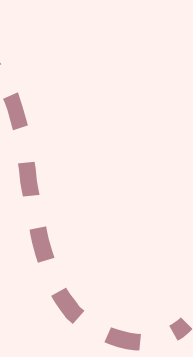
- 1.** Empower students to guide their own learning.
- 2.** Create a culture of collaborative learning together.
- 3.** Encourage risk-taking and experimentation.
- 4.** Promote imaginative thinking.
- 5.** Accept the different emotions that play can create.



IN CLOSING



-No matter what level we teach or whomever we teach, it's easy to forget that while we want to teach meaningful lessons, we can't forget that we all have need to learn to have fun.



-Getting the children at the gakudo to not see lessons as "class" but as part of "play" was a challenge, but a well-disguised class can offer great opportunities.

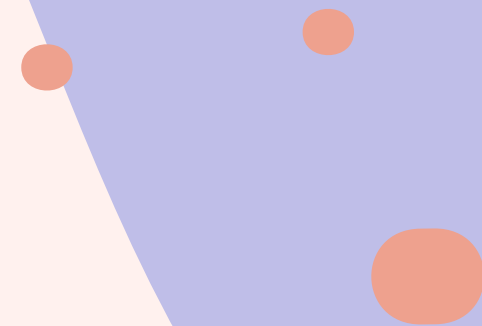
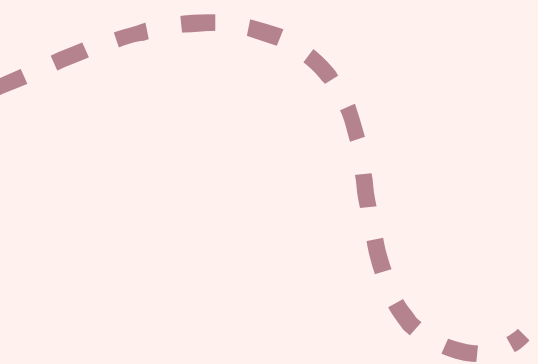
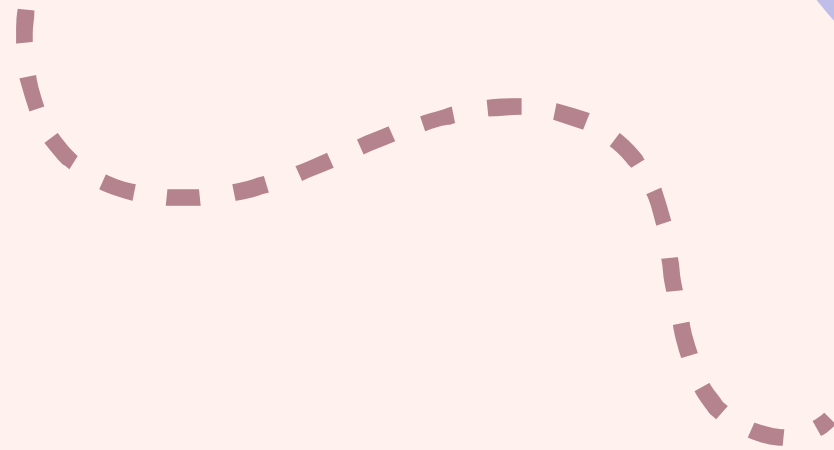
-As an ALT, this was a concept I wish I knew, but I understood the more I learned what students responded to.

-Students should be allowed to "play" as part of their learning.

-Enjoy learning! Enjoy English!



**THANK
YOU**





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