

## Bunka to Eigo (Culture & English)

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### Overview:

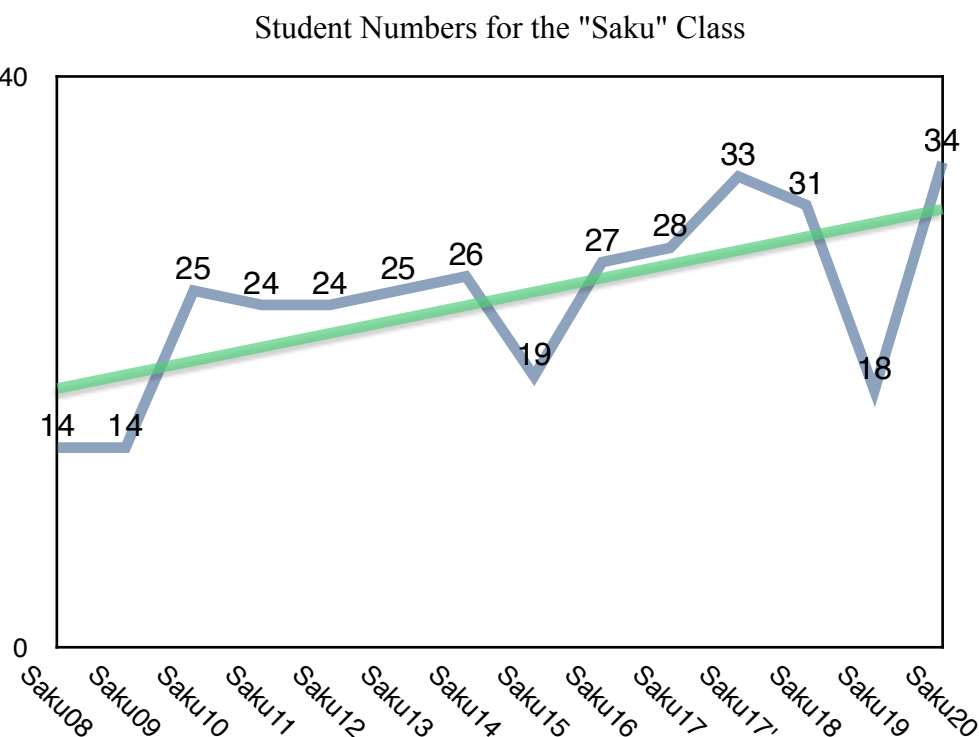
This class, which was previously billed as a composition class, has been taught by the instructor every year he has worked at the university. It is set up to be for 1st-semester sophomores, but typically a smattering of seniors also sign up for the class, this year being no exception.

In its earlier iterations, a significant majority of the the students had been EFL and EIU (Education for International Understanding) majors, but, now nearly all of the students are in the Elementary School Teacher-training Program.

### Concerns with class size:

In an article on class size for writing classes—which this, for the most, part is—Horning (2007) tells us that the "leading national organization on the teaching of college writing, then, clearly states that the maximum class size for writing classes should be twenty or fewer students for regular classes, and recommends an even smaller size for developmental courses, in which students need even more individual attention."

This is born out in other publications, which quite often cite the "optimal" enrollment of 15 to a max of 20 for writing-centered classes. As can be seen from the chart given here, however, this particular "writing" class size has, for the most part, exhibited a steady rise in numbers over its "lifetime". Previously, in a report for the Saku17 class of three years ago, the instructor had noted his hope that the jump up to 33 students might just be an outlier, but, as can be seen from the more recent data—to the right of the graph—it unfortunately was not.



## **Use of Feedback:**

Even when the enrollment numbers made giving more detailed feedback even feasible, the instructor had begun to have doubts about the effectiveness of providing such feedback in the form of grammatical corrections. And, in fact, studies have gone as far to have stated that "grammar correction has no place in writing courses." (Truscott, 1996)

As this is not, however, a one-sided lecture class, interaction between teacher and students—including feedback from the teacher—is called for. Over his years teaching similar courses in Japan, the instructor has determined that going over representative grammar problems, and doing it in a way that includes suggestions from peers, can be helpful. Using Moodle, he chooses representative errors from the students' compositions, assigns those problems to everyone, and then goes over suggestions for changes/edits in the class with everyone participating, first in groups and then with the class as a whole.

## **Student Feedback on the Collaborative Correction Exercises:**

The instructor has, on various occasions, conducted informal, anonymously submitted, evaluations using Moodle. The students typically have given the Correction assignment a respectable score ( normally greater than 4 out of 5 on a Likert-scale rating item). Also, when, asked during class, they are quite positive about the benefits of this activity (though sometimes it can be quite time consuming). Below are some comments (very loosely translated from Japanese by the instructor) they have provided to a survey question relating to that portion of the course.

It was nice to learn not only how to write English compositions, but also detailed ways of expressing oneself.

I think that the corrections made it possible to master practical grammatical skills.

In Corrections, I was able to listen to various opinions and it was a great learning experience. I could study natural English not written in the textbook.

I learned how to write correctly in English grammar and English composition.

I learned how the rules of English work

I was able to interact with other people in group work.

It was very useful for me to correct grammar.

All in all, this method of providing feedback to students in which all students play an active part along with the teacher seems to be working out relatively well, although it can be, as noted, above, somewhat time consuming.

## **References:**

- Horning, Alice. 2007. "The Definitive Article of Class Size." WPA: *Writing Program Administration Volume 31*, Numbers 1-2, Fall/Winter 2007.
- Truscott, John. 1996. "The Case Against Grammar Correction in L2 Writing Classes". *Language Learning* 46:2. June 1996, pp. 327-369.