

Lance Knowles
(1975~76, 79~86)
LIOJ Director, 1979~1985

I first became aware of LIOJ in 1975 when I applied to teach at several schools in Japan. What struck me was the excellent description of the program and an obvious concern for quality. The total immersion, residential program was especially attractive and differentiated it from other schools. There was also a sense of larger purpose and idealism that was very attractive and refreshing: to improve international communication and understanding.



This positive impression was strengthened in the application and interview process. The interview was conducted in San Francisco by Rowland and Mrs. Harker, and shortly thereafter I received the necessary visa materials to leave for Japan. For the next year and a half I taught at LIOJ. The director was William Harshbarger, and under his leadership the teaching environment was ideal. The small classes, intensive schedule and excellent students allowed for innovative teaching approaches. LIOJ even had its own journal, *Cross Currents*, with its first editor, Michael Joy. In addition, there were staff retreats and seminars, and the constant sharing of ideas among the faculty. This made for excellent teacher development. Mr. Harshbarger loved teaching and thinking about teaching, and he inspired others to do so.

After leaving LIOJ, I returned to teach at UC Extension in Berkeley. Some of the ideas that were developed at LIOJ led to the writing of a textbook by myself and another LIOJ teacher, Ruth Sasaki, and it was eventually published.

In 1979 I was offered the job of director of LIOJ by then director Roger Pehlke and Mr. Shibusawa, head of the MRA Foundation. I accepted the position and decided to do everything I could to make it the program even better than it was. Recognizing my own lack of experience in a management role, I took an interest in learning more about management styles and other aspects of running a business. From this perspective, it was interesting for me to note the differences in the program under the different styles of leadership of my predecessors. Whereas the program had been a cauldron of teaching development under Bill Harshbarger, Roger Pehlke seemed to focus more on management, communication, and the attracting of a diverse group of teachers who were given a large amount of freedom to develop their own teaching approaches. In our discussions, he shared many of his insights about managing people and conflict, and he helped me to better appreciate the importance of the management process.

As new director, I aimed to strike a balance that would build on the strengths of each of my predecessors. Looking at student feedback when I arrived, and the fact that enrollments were seriously down, I felt that though the program had an outstanding group of teachers, each with their own ideas and teaching philosophies, the program as a whole needed to be better defined so that it would have more consistency—even if

it meant imposing constraints on what kinds of activities teachers could do at various times of the day. I also felt that it was important to redefine the Business English portion of the program so that it would better meet the diverse needs of client companies, which included many of Japan's leading companies. To improve conditions for the faculty, I worked with the Management Committee to significantly increase teacher salaries while at the same time emphasizing the importance of the teachers continuing to eat a majority of their meals with the students. The salary increases meant that we had to raise student tuitions, particularly for the residential Business Program. Though increasing the tuition had its risks, I felt that if we could deliver the quality, companies would accept it, and delivering a better product demanded the attracting of the best teachers. This also meant that we would have to communicate more closely with our larger clients and spend more time listening to their needs and explaining how our program was designed. Eventually, this led to our including a trip to a client company in each of our teacher orientation training programs. These trips gave us the chance to visit former students, who would often give us a presentation, and to see them on the job. Some of these companies included Nippon Steel, Bridgestone Tire, Nippon Light Metal, and Toyota.

At the core of the program, LIOJ had a dedicated office staff and a faculty that worked hard, both in the classroom and in the residential aspects of the program such as meals with students, late night discussions with students, and other special activities. LIOJ teachers came from a variety of backgrounds. Though language teaching experience was generally required, the most important characteristic I looked for when hiring faculty was that they *cared* about what they did and could be trusted to follow-through. From the essays they submitted, explaining why they wanted to teach at LIOJ, through the personal interview at the end of the selection process, those who showed persistence and the emotional strength necessary to live in an intense, residential program were selected. I really wanted people who would rise to the challenge of trying to be the best and with whom we would enjoy living and working.

Given the strong character of our faculty, for most of my tenure, a creative tension existed between the need to have a strong program and the need to have enough freedom and flexibility so that each teacher could teach in their own way. Most of the faculty seemed to understand the benefits of this approach, and the results were gratifying, with enrollments and feedback improving each year, even to the point where we had waiting lists. The structure of the program encouraged teachers to develop their teaching skills in new ways and in some cases they published textbooks as a result. The list of key teachers is too long to list here, but some of the notables include: John Battaglia, Jim Bergstrom, Andrew Blasky, Mehta Bos, Penny James, (Magic) Mike Kleindl, Elizabeth Neblett, Ruth Sasaki, and Donald Freeman, who later went on to become the President of TESOL and a faculty member at the School for International Training. We also managed to keep and sustain our journal, *Cross Currents*, which I felt made an important contribution to teacher development and also provided its editors and authors with a path to better job opportunities beyond LIOJ. Those late night meetings with the editorial staff were something to treasure.

The residential Business Program was the heart of the program while I was there. We generally had four or five classes of between six and nine students per term, and we ran eleven 4-week terms per year. Each class had three teachers and met for approximately nine hours per day. The morning block met from 8:30 to 12:00, with a focus on "micro" English. The afternoon block met from 1:00 to 3:30, with a focus on "macro" English, and the "business" block met from 4:30 to 6:30 and again from 7:00 to 8:30, with a focus on business English, including oral presentations, business situations, telephone skills, and business vocabulary. Students and faculty generally ate meals together, and the students lived in the English-only environment of Asia Center. Many students reported dreaming in English at night, and a few of those who went home on weekends reported trying to speak English even at their home.

The students in the Business Program ranged in age from newly-hired freshmen to senior managers in their mid or late fifties. A typical class would be a mixture of two or three managers, three or four engineers, and one or two trainees. A large percentage of the students were being prepared for overseas assignments, and most were highly motivated, hardworking, and extremely interesting individuals with a variety of interests. Certainly one of the most valuable aspects of the program for both students and faculty was the opportunity to exchange views and learn from each other, not only about English, but even about other companies, countries, and areas of expertise. Several students reported to me that the LIOJ experience was one of the most valuable experiences in their lives.

In addition to the residential Business Program, LIOJ offered several other programs. There were classes for the Odawara community, including classes for children, high school, and adults. These classes usually met once or twice weekly and were a chance for teachers and staff to build relations with people from the surrounding community. These classes also gave the faculty a chance to better understand the teaching conditions most common in Japan, where students study once or twice a week and progress is painfully slow, and in some cases non-existent, since attendance for some was more of a social opportunity than a chance to really improve English language skills. Despite the difficulties however, there was some innovative teaching that came out of the program and many of the students stayed on for several years.

For many, the annual LIOJ Summer Workshop for Teachers, was the highlight of the year. For one week each summer, teachers from high schools and middle schools from all over Japan would come to Asia Center to spend a week in an English-only environment, improving their own English language skills and learning about the newest ideas and approaches in English language teaching. In addition to an expanded LIOJ faculty, well-known guest lecturers made presentations throughout the week. These guest lecturers included some of the most famous people in the field of English language teaching, including Richard Via (East-West Center), Robert O'Neill (author), John Fanselow (Columbia University), and Sumako Kimizuka (USC), who helped to found the Workshop.

Throughout it all, what did we accomplish? Well, large changes often begin with small steps, and the many thousands of students and faculty who have gone through LIOJ have surely helped to evolve the kind of global consciousness that is necessary for a better future. In my opinion, LIOJ was a magic place where small miracles happened on a regular basis. Each and every month, people's attitudes changed in significant ways. Japanese businessmen, students and teachers, who had never felt comfortable around "foreigners" broke through their shells and experienced a larger humanity, no longer restricted to the stereotypic thinking that dehumanized much of the world. Foreigners who came to teach in Japan encountered a new and different culture, forever changing their view of themselves and their own culture.

Since leaving LIOJ in 1986, more than fifteen years ago, my wife, Yoshiko (former LIOJ Marketing Manager), and I have continued to build on what we learned and experienced at LIOJ. Together with a team of engineers and artists, we established a new company, DynEd International, in 1987, which pioneered the use of computers and multimedia in language teaching. DynEd programs are now used in schools, universities and companies throughout the world. Not only did we benefit from the teaching experience we gained at LIOJ, but we also took with us the vision and ideals that guide us to work for a better world. In this way, through those who were lucky enough to live and work at LIOJ, the seeds that were planted and nourished there will continue to grow, spread, and flourish in new ways.

Lance Knowles is president of DynEd International. He lives in San Francisco with his family. He has returned to LIOJ several times to participate in the Summer Workshop as a guest teacher.