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(1990~96)
LIOJ Director: 1994~96

The atmosphere that pervaded over LIOJ before the beginning of my directorship in 1994, was a sense of unsettlement. The Business Communication Program was closing. The publishing of *Cross Currents* ended rather abruptly in 1992. LIOJ teachers in the International Understanding (Team Teaching) Program, who developed of the program while serving as team teachers in a number of Odawara junior high schools, were replaced by the city in 1993 with teachers from the JET Program and Odawara's sister cities.



With the closure of the BCP already decided, I was in a daze and had resigned myself to look elsewhere for work. When Don Maybin asked me to see him at his office, I imagined that he wanted to go over the paper work before I left LIOJ for good. In the office were Mr. Nakayama, managing director of the MRA Foundation; and Miyuki Ohno, the office manager of LIOJ, and Don, who I knew was leaving for “greener pastures,” to teach at Fuji Phoenix College in Gotemba. A replacement for Don hadn’t been mentioned until Mr. Nakayama asked me if I was interested. I knew there were other people with better qualifications and experience, and I never thought that the director’s position would be offered to me. After several days of consultations with, and encouragement from, my closest colleagues and friends, I accepted the position.

According to Mr. Shibusawa, the BCP was no longer economically and organizationally viable. It was true. The value of the yen was at an all-time high, making overseas training programs extremely enticing for companies. Competition from other schools with similar programs, particularly in the Kansai area, reduced our clientele base. Companies' domestic training budgets were trimmed; thus, they questioned the economic viability of sending their employees to LIOJ. Don and Miyuki had paid a number of visits to LIOJ’s regular clients, including Ciba Geigy, Kansai Paint, Nippon Lever, AIU and others, in an attempt to draw up business, but responses from the companies weren’t encouraging.

As a way to somehow keep the BCP running, I tried vainly, to think of several scenarios to make the program economically viable: Why don’t we maintain the core of the business curriculum but reduce the number of levels or classes....or reduce staffing....or shorten the program from three weeks to two weeks....or offer BCP once a month, I asked Mr. Shibusawa. The answer from MRA management was that the program had run its course: The BCP had served its purpose. It was a dinosaur, and the experiment should be concluded.

With the impending closure of the BCP, it was decided that term #255 would be the last official term, and in the meantime, teachers were already making their plans for life after LIOJ. One BCP teacher decided that it was a good time to do some traveling

around the world, a few applied at graduate schools, some desired a protracted break, and others sought employment at other language schools in Japan. Not surprisingly, some teachers in the BCP wanted to continue to teach at LIOJ and expressed their wish to teach in the Community Program. At the same time, CP teachers were unsure about the role(s) they would play after the BCP closure. Would their contract be renewed, or would they also be part of the retrenchment? Also, CP teachers questioned whether BCP teachers could teach children, arguably the most challenging age group to handle. How would the new CP teachers be trained?

By spring, we had made these instructional and organizational decisions. There would be training sessions for children's classes, including workshops, classroom observations, team teaching, and so on. Experienced CP teachers regularly contributed their vast knowledge and expertise to novices—such as me. Although we did not appoint a supervisor for the Community Program that year, teachers appreciated the openness in sharing instructional ideas and suggestions. For the first time, LIOJ offered pre-school classes for kindergarten children which were well received. In addition, we held informal English classes in the waiting room for mothers of elementary school children, giving them suggestions on how they could teach their kids English at home.

The idea of implementing a team teaching program in Matsuda town (near Odawara) had a very inauspicious beginning. Mr. Saito, the former head of Matsuda schools and a good friend of mine, informed me about a part-time teaching opportunity at Yadoriki and Matsuda Junior High Schools. This was before I knew that I would be offered the director's position at LIOJ. Although team teaching was practiced at various schools in Odawara, the Matsuda teachers were relatively new to team teaching. Jim Kahny, who was head of Special Programs, was consulted and we felt this would be a great opportunity to set up a team teaching program with the Matsuda junior high schools. The Team Teaching Program in junior high schools officially restarted in April 1994 with Jim heading the program.

My first year as a director was a learning period. Community Program teachers saw to it that I got experience teaching kids, and my first class was teaching second grade children. Don assisted me with organizing the upcoming Summer Workshop, Mr. Nakayama reacquainted me with the operations of the MRA Foundation, and the office staff prepared me for the management roles that I was to take on to enhance LIOJ's image.

LIOJ was competing for students with the conversation schools near Odawara station. We made a concerted effort to preserve our uniqueness while enhancing our visibility in various areas. LIOJ increased the number of High School Intensives and initiated private intensives for high school students. We developed a flexible, short-term business English course for companies and offered it when there was a need. We opened English "mini-classes" for mothers while their children were in class. We also hosted a JALT chapter meeting at LIOJ, invited international scholars, and gave our support the JALT Four Corners Asian Scholar tour.

One program that we attempted to initiate was a pre-departure training program for company executives and their families. The intent was to offer studies in communication styles, cultural differences, values clarification, how to deal with

culture shock, and so on. We envisioned involving spouses in the program so that they could become aware of their perceptual differences within the context of a host culture environment. Although the program never got off the ground, we discovered through our marketing efforts, that even after the BCP was shut down, LIOJ continued to generate interest from our former Business Program clients. With the help of our teaching staff in the Community Program, we structured a two and three-week residential program, which consisted of “core” business classes, with time set aside for self-access and for evening activities such as cocktail parties, a magic show, and lecture hours.

One of the business contracts LIOJ managed to procure was with our former client, Proctor & Gamble. P&G asked LIOJ to set up an eight-week, residential English communication course for their new recruits. Several problems had to be dealt with before we could take on the course. Asia Center was booked full in the spring, which included not only the second and third floor rooms, but the East Annex and Guest Houses as well. Meanwhile, the office staff checked business hotels, *minshukus*, company dormitories, and apartments in Odawara and surrounding areas, but nothing was available that would suit our particular needs. Another obstacle was recruiting instructional staff who could get the program off and running with minimal training, and could work independently.

We cleared one obstacle by locating a training complex in the Tama area, near Machida city. Though distant from Odawara, (about an hour and a half commute each way), we found the Japan Travel Bureau (JTB) facilities the ideal setting for training P&G students as they featured restaurant cafeterias, spacious classrooms and hotel-like bedrooms.

The other hurdle was staffing. Our logical choice was to search for LIOJ alumni in Japan. We called Barbara Hoskins, Bonnie Peirce, Mike Kleindl, Don Maybin; some we could not reach and others had prior commitments. While Miyuki inquired about available lodging, I was on the phone calling BCP alumni all over the world. Our final search took us to Morocco where I woke up Tandy Bailey and Nouredine Seffar. Lynn Bergschneider, another LIOJ alum, was spending some time with Tandy and Nouredine. I contacted Adam and Amy (Absher) Young in Phoenix, Arizona. Luckily for us, Lynn, Adam, and Amy agreed to head up the P&G project. We rented an apartment near the JTB travel center to house Lynn, Amy, and Adam. Jim and I would shuttle back and forth for a few days of classes a week.

LIOJ managed rather smoothly despite the fact that we had other intensives running at the same time, which included a two-week BCP course, the Matsushita Institute of Government and Management course, in addition to High School Intensives. Much gratitude had to be given to Jim for commuting back and forth to various places while juggling a number of different tasks.

The number of Summer Workshop participants continued to decline. A reduction in our Workshop budget forced LIOJ to reduce the overall number of overseas invitees, including scholarship recipients from Thailand, Korea, and Hong Kong, and speakers from Europe. On a brighter note, LIOJ continued to award a scholarship to Thai TESOL each year, and we expanded our partnership with Korea TESOL by inviting a member to the Workshop. The Workshop also introduced panel discussions featuring

participants from many parts of Asia such as Indonesia, Cambodia, Thailand, Laos, Philippines, Hong Kong, and Japan.

I had mixed feelings when I decided to tender my resignation to Mr. Shibusawa and Mr. Nakayama. Of course, I felt a sense of relief, but there was also a sense of accomplishment. Some doubters said that LIOJ was a sinking ship, and that it would not last. Some bade me a sarcastic “good luck.” After a couple of years, however, I knew that LIOJ was on solid ground. Though the BCP would never be the same as before it closed in 1994, LIOJ managed to maintain the core of its curriculum, and it continues to attract business clients even today. We publicized two- and three-day High School Intensives, and an average of four or five intensives were slated each year. We worked hard to provide high schools with intercultural experiences and offer pre-departure training for Tokyo Jogakkan High School for their annual visit to Oregon. Community Program classes continued to attract students from around the Odawara area, the Team Teaching Program at junior high schools was a hit, and the Thailand/Japan Team Teaching Exchange continued to flourish.

Without the contributions and support of a group of hard working and dedicated individuals, LIOJ would not be in existence today. There were so many people—the teachers, the office staff, and management—to thank as I concluded my work.

I also felt LIOJ was in capable hands when Jim took the helm as director. Jim, not one to acknowledge his contributions, had given so much to LIOJ and its programs, whether it was commuting to Matsushita Institute in Tsujido, or driving the country roads to Yadoriki Junior High School, or being Santa Claus for the Community Program Christmas party. Recommending Jim to fill the director’s position was one of the best decisions LIOJ ever made.