

Freshman Seminar I : An Introduction to Education for Teamwork –A Reflection on Six Year Experience–

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Key words : Freshman seminar I, Introduction to education, Survey of collaboration, Effectiveness

Education in upper secondary school nowadays is called ‘inactive’ and teachers are taking an initiative and developing various methods. Compared with this, education at university level requires students should be active and they must learn voluntarily and independently, rather than just listening to lectures without thinking. However, combined with the problem of recent declining of academic standards, it is often said that such differences between upper secondary schools and universities have expanded year by year and created many students who will be unable to accomplish university education¹⁾. In response to such tendencies, Freshman Seminar I was offered of consideration at preparatory meeting since the establishment of the university with the primary objective to help students to enjoy their college life. Establishment of the Committee for Educational Development will also help faculty and students regarding the course arrangement.

The General Instructional Objective (GIO): GIO of Freshman Seminar is ‘to acquire the basic ability of interpersonal exchange and a consciousness regarding health and safety,²⁾ in accordance with basic knowledge and technique to study’. Specific Behavioral Objectives (SBOs) in response to this are shown in Table 1. Basic knowledge and technique needed for study are mentioned¹⁾. Under SBO-1, objectives are expected to be promoted by students’ vigorous activities, such as tackling the theme decided under the

consultation between teachers in charge and students in classroom. In the same way, ability of basic interpersonal exchange is supposed to be fostered by human rapport in such learning activities or in a social event for students and teachers, conducted as a part of Freshman Seminar. Since interpersonal skill is considered to be fostered as a foundation of collaborative education that stresses a great importance to teamwork, the goal must be focused in connection with Freshman Seminar II, which follows the Freshman Seminar I. International exchange is required to develop consciousness regarding to health and safety, especially smoking, drinking and infectious diseases, and all of these are expected to be a content of Freshman Seminar I as much as possible.

In order to achieve such SBOs, in general, one teacher is assigned from a department for eight to ten students from the same department to act as person in charge of managing . The class is offered simultaneously in the third hour of every Wednesday. Although the syllabus shows the course plan of fourteen lessons, the teacher in charge conducts actual lectures at their discretion within the framework of the basic contents that are suitable for the field of each department, rather than conducting the same program simultaneously for all departments. Although the offices of teachers in charge or a seminar room is generally assigned as classroom, a general gathering of each department and the ‘gathering

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for telling their ambition^(note1), a forum of get together classes are conducted in the middle of June in a mid-size or large classrooms.

Although the educational material “A Step to Intellect” (published by Kuroshio press) is designated as the standard, but it is not compulsory. In some cases, the theme focused on in the seminar is decided by consultation between teachers and students rather than the specialty of the department or the teacher in charge. When we surveyed the class using a questionnaire regarding contents conducted in fiscal year 2006, it turned out that various activities had been selected, for example, Researching what the students were interested in and making presentations in front of other members; Conducting literature searches regarding the department’s specialty on their own and making presentations; Compiling reports by conducting fieldwork; Making materials to present their department to visitors during open campus.

The Freshman Seminar I has been changed a little by little for every of the last six years since its founding and we have reconsidered and thought many times in order to contribute for the improvement of the contents of Freshman Seminar I and how to do it. The Committee for Educational Development has conducted questionnaires with students and teachers three times between the fiscal year of 2004 and this year, and the answers are accumulated into data. The purpose of this manuscript is to examine the need for future tasks in accordance with analyzing the status quo of Freshman Seminar I from the results of these questionnaires and answers.

Method

The questionnaire for students is distributed in the last hour of Freshman Seminar I class of the first semester of every year and collected at the end of the class. The content is shown in figure 1. Although the response sheet is anonymous, it is necessary to write the name of their department

for handling data. The questionnaire for teachers has added items regarding the exchange between teachers and students, learning results, evaluation of this subject, ideas regarding the necessity of improvement and so on, partly based on the questionnaire for students. After finishing the course, they are collected within ten days to two weeks. The content is shown in Figure 2. Although the response sheet is anonymous, it is necessary to write their department name and length of experience in years they took charge of Freshman Seminar I for data treatment. Treating these results from both questionnaires, the reactions toward multiple choices were presented by a percentage. The answers of free-description were omitted this time. Additionally, until fiscal year 2004, the subjects answering the questionnaire were from the five departments, Physical therapy, Occupational Therapy, Speech Therapy, Health and Nutrition, and Social Welfare, but the health and sports department was added in fiscal year 2005, and the nursing department was added in fiscal year 2006.

Results and Discussion

We have shown the result of the questionnaire to students (the average of all departments). Firstly, the response to the item regarding basic learning ability fluctuated widely by the year of admission and it was difficult to find a fixed tendency. One of the possible help for this may come from Freshman Seminar I, however, the views and methods of evaluating basic learning ability have not been well defined, and it seemed to be hard for the students to judge how much improvement of ability they had achieved. It is now necessary that we set the means of evaluation firmly and review from what kind of ability the students acquired. As a second possible reason, as above, because the program of Freshman Seminar I is assigned to teachers, there is a possibility that it will change each year due to the interactions between individual students and teachers, and it

is necessary that evaluation of students reflects this interaction.

Compared with this, the items regarding interpersonal exchange and impressions in gathering to tell each other's ambition and the general degree of satisfaction have mostly remained unchanged in three years and a positive reaction accounts for 70~80% of the total answers. Especially, regarding 'to make friends and exchange of information' and 'meet to tell ambition', almost 80% of the students evaluated the content of the Freshman Seminar positive, and it is considered that the activity goal to make friends in a small-number class and to become familiar with teachers in charge, with regard to interpersonal exchange, has been mostly accomplished.

Regarding to the interaction among students or between students and teachers, there were over 70% of teachers every year who thought that Freshman Seminar I was useful and the same tendency was shown from students' answers. On the other hand, it can be considered that Freshman Seminar I is offering students some kind of "grounding" of the university and even students who are not enthusiastic about club activities feel comfortable and a sense of belonging by meeting there and discussing the seminar's issues with fellow students, regularly. One reason why the number of students who take a leave of absence or withdraw from the university has decreased approximately 0.5~1% from the national average may be due to Freshman Seminar I.

Sixty per cent of the teachers were asked to advice students in Freshman Seminar I during past three years. Among them only 40% were asked for advice concerning their life. Number of teachers who asked for advice regarding registration has increased gradually. There were few students who asked their teachers for advice regarding their own life. Like other universities, if we set up some kind of students' health center, and teachers who take charge in the seminar play

a role as a bridge to students, students and teachers can make a mutual development in university life.

Teachers opinions requiring improvements regarding the proper directions of Freshman Seminar I were indicated in nearly 70% to 90% of all respondents. Outlining their main points, there were opinions such as we should arrange the achievement goal in each subject. We should improve the situation wherein each department has different tasks, to accomplish our activity goals if tasks are not suitable. Since we will offer the comprehensive seminar under the new curriculum from fiscal year 2008, the curricula must be correlated with Freshman Seminar I, II and Integrated Learning Seminar.

We must consider teachers' opinions promptly in future and have a forum to examine again to reset to the aspect of teamwork education in our university, namely, an improved curriculum of Freshman Seminar I.

Summary

Freshman Seminar I is the foundation of collaborative education in our university, and in accordance with looking back at the intention and purpose of offering this course and summarizing the result of questionnaires conducted since fiscal year 2004 till 2006, and analyzing the opinions of teachers' and students', we must evaluate the status quo and have introduced some proposals about future tasks.

Reference:

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of upper secondary education. Asahi paperback
library. Tokyo. 49-77. 2003.
- 2) Syllabus fiscal year 2006 version. Niigata
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Note 1 : Every new student writes an essays
entitled ‘My dream/ambition’ as requested from
the president as they are admitted to university
and representatives selected in each department
make presentations in a gathering of all first-year
students and guidance teachers.

