

Teaching at Non-Academic SHS

—the double-edged sword of working in vocational schools

● Differences between Academic and Non-Academic:

- Academic schools oriented primarily towards entry into universities.
- Non-Academic schools oriented toward acquiring job skills or entry into vocational institutions.

● The Problems:

- English is not a high priority, meaning less support for the English department.
- Generally a low level of English ability among students.
- Students lack motivation because they don't see any tangible benefits to learning English.
- ALT often under-utilized (used as “tape-recorder,” etc.).

● The Benefits:

- Under-utilization gives ALTs space to create their own roles.
- Less pressure on performance in English can mean more freedom.

● Dealing with the Problems:

- Don't rely on the school staff to do everything for you. Use as many outside resources as possible.
- There may not be support for an English club, so moonlight all of your students' clubs instead.
- Teach the basics for everyday conversational English. Make it useful for them.
- Be the motivation to speak English by interacting with students extensively outside the classroom.
- Try teaching a few classes on English related to your school's vocational field.

● Cashing In on the Benefits:

- Never underestimate your students' ability to learn and use English. They will surprise you!
- If under-utilized, try presenting well-planned ideas to expand your role in Oral Communications classes.
- Use the freedom to have a few more classes on cultural exchange (holidays, pop-culture, etc.)
- Try developing hands-on English projects in your students' vocations:
 - ✧ PowerPoint presentations, English website for school, “How-to” demonstrations, etc.

● Conclusion and Advice: —take the sword by the handle instead of the blade

- Low pressure means you must be self-motivated and take the initiative.
- But don't be too pushy. It will only make things more difficult for your future ideas.
- Relax! Don't push your vocational students into being academics. Coax them into becoming English speakers within the framework of their interests and studies.