

# Testimonial for Professor Anthony Robins on the Occasion of His Retirement

**Oliver Mayer**

Anthony Robins was born in London and grew up in Eastbourne, a seaside town on the south coast of England. He studied English and history at the University of York, and after graduation he worked as an English teacher in England and Greece. After a year's postgraduate course to receive a teaching qualification, which included teaching practice in England and Spain, he first came to Japan nearly 40 years ago, in 1983, to work at a language school in Tokyo. After that, except for a few years back in his native England (1991-1995), including studies for his master's degree, he has been continuously living and teaching in Aichi Prefecture since 1987: at Toyohashi University of Technology (1987-1991), Nagoya Institute of Technology (1995-2000) and at Aichi University of Education (since 2000).

I first met Anthony Robins in October 1994 in Tokyo. We share a common interest not only in language education, but also in transportation, history and urban development, and we are both members of the Japanese Railway Society, a group specializing in sharing information about Japan's railways among non-Japanese enthusiasts, although also including Japanese members. It was fortunate that a position to teach German opened up at Aichi University of Education in 2001, so I could join Anthony in the Department of Foreign Languages as well as the International Culture (Kokusai-bunka) Course just one year after he started working here. Back then, Anthony, myself and our French colleague, Antoine Fraysse, formed a trio focussing on teaching English, German and French

communication classes for International Culture Course majors. These classes were taught once or twice a week for three years, thus enabling us to build up a close relationship with our students while at the same time helping them to improve their foreign language abilities. Our classes were always in the same time slot in classrooms close to each other on the same corridor, so we kept close contact among ourselves as well as with the other teachers in the Ōbei-bunka (European and American Cultural Studies) section of the International Culture Course. Besides that we also taught classes for students in other majors.

In 2007, the curriculum of the International Culture Course changed, and from then on it was possible for students to combine French or German communication classes with English communication classes. This was a significant change, as in the old curriculum students had to choose one language and could not study another one. From then, they could combine English, the lingua franca, with either German or French, thus extending their knowledge of English while at the same time building up an expertise in a second foreign language, thus making a big step towards becoming global citizens. The 2007 curriculum reform also increased the number of English classes, and therefore I also started teaching English. Often, Anthony and I would each teach a group of students in classrooms next to each other, using the same textbook, and exchanging students between classes on a regular basis to give students a chance to interact with as many speaking partners as possible.

In his classes, Anthony has focussed on helping students to improve their ability to express themselves in English by emphasising the need to extend students' vocabulary. He has often used videos in his classes and has included an international perspective, which he had gathered from traveling to many countries in America, Asia, Australasia and Europe. Another feature of his classes is that he has invited many guests,

foreigners living in and visiting Japan as well as former students. He has also invited many international students studying at Aichi University of Education to his classes. I was surprised to see that he has kept in close contact with many of his students over all the years he has spent in Japan, and he would also use these contacts to organise trips to schools where former students are now teaching to show international students the reality of Japanese schools.

The years around 2010 were a period with a very international focus: In the Ōbei-bunka section of the International Culture Course, there were 15 teachers, four each for French and German studies, and seven for English and American studies. With four teachers from the Department of Social Studies (one each in charge of German and French studies and two for English/American studies) and eleven from the Department of Foreign Languages, it was a true interdisciplinary course. Furthermore, four of the 15 teachers were non-Japanese, with one from Britain (Anthony), one from France (Antoine Fraysse), one from Germany (myself) and one from North America (first Jane Noritz-Nakagawa, later James Venema) each covering the four major regions that the Ōbei-bunka represented. Foreigners making up more than a quarter of the faculty has been and still is very unusual in Japan, but it shows the global outlook that the International Culture Course had back then, of which Anthony Robins was an important pillar.

One aspect of Anthony's teaching has left a lasting impression on generations of students: He has basically only spoken English in his classes. While the aspect of only using English (called "all English") while teaching English in classrooms has recently been discussed intensively in Japan, Anthony has used this method all the time. By largely avoiding any Japanese he created a classroom environment that comes as close to being abroad as one can do when teaching in Japan. Many of his students

thought that he did not know any Japanese as they never heard him speaking it, and they were surprised when – sometimes after taking his classes for several years – suddenly noticed that he was speaking in Japanese!

Teaching foreign languages and cultural studies in a classroom is one thing, but actually experiencing them is different. Therefore, it has always been Anthony's goal to enable students to spend time abroad to immerse themselves in a foreign culture. He helped to set up the partnership with Newman University in Birmingham and was also strongly involved in the Australian teaching practice program as well as in other exchange programs. He has often spoken about these programs at conferences in Japan as well as abroad, and published extensively about those experiences.

Anthony has worked on university committees as diverse as those taking care of the botanical garden, promotions, timetable scheduling and teaching licence renewal, as well as being involved in entrance examinations. He was also the head of Ōbei-bunka for three years and of the International Culture Course for four years. Outside of Aichi University of Education, he has volunteered as a judge at junior high and high school speech contests, and he has been active in the Japan Association of Language Teaching (JALT), previously as the coordinator of the JALT Teacher Education and Development special interest group and now as the longtime president of the JALT Toyohashi chapter.

When the International Culture Course ended, both Anthony and myself moved to the Department of Educational Administration and Governance in 2017. While this department and the course of the same name are less internationally focussed than the International Culture Course, the Educational Governance Course includes a global section with colleagues and students who have a keen interest in a variety of

international issues as well as international educational research. Especially noteworthy is the 'World Education' class which Anthony designed, and where he has taught Japanese and international students about educational systems around the world, including by inviting visitors to his class, in person as well as online in the Covid era. After Anthony's retirement, I will take over this World Education class, and I hope that I will be able to give students a similar international outlook as well. However, Anthony's experiences that he gathered in four decades of teaching will be hard if not impossible to match.