

# **A Communicative Approach to Curriculum Development at Junior Colleges**

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## A COMMUNICATIVE APPROACH TO CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT AT JUNIOR COLLEGES

### INTRODUCTION

This paper is meant to provide some ideas for designing an English language curriculum that puts more emphasis on communicative competency, at the junior college level. In this paper I would like to present some suggestions on how teachers can make their lessons more communication-oriented and how foreign and Japanese staff can work together to increase the level of communicative competence of their students. I would also like to present an outline for a curriculum designed to increase students' communication skills in all four skill areas, with some suggestions on integrating Japanese teachers' and foreign teachers' lessons/curriculum.

This paper is drawn from the author's experience at Tokai Women's Junior College as well as universities in Korea and Mexico, both teaching and designing curriculum. Although Tokai Women's Junior College may not accurately represent all junior colleges in Japan I believe my experiences can be drawn upon to give a fairly broad idea of junior college students, their abilities, and the type of curriculum that could effectively increase their ability to achieve communicative competence in English.

A frequent complaint that I hear from many motivated students upon graduating is that after many years of formal English study (including two years at Tokai) they feel that they still can not speak English well. I believe that this is representative of many graduates from most junior colleges in Japan. There are many reasons that these graduating students can not speak English to the degree that they would like. Some are beyond the control of the faculty but some issues could be addressed within the colleges' English departments, especially when creating or improving a curriculum.

I would like to take a look at two of these issues in this paper, first the curriculum itself and more importantly the attitude toward the curriculum as well as what the students are expected to do with it. While the Education Ministry has some requirements to be adhered to, individual departments do have a fair amount of leeway to develop curriculum that could be centered on communicative competency (increasing communicative competency is in fact one of the stated goals of the Ministry).

When developing a curriculum that is meant to increase fluency or communicative competence we should first clarify what it is we want to do and how it can help facilitate our students' goals. We should first make clear to ourselves the academic goals of the institution and the department. We should be able to answer these questions: What are the overall academic goals of our department? How can the new curriculum help achieve these goals? Is communicative competency a primary goal? A secondary goal? A goal? If it has been established that communicative competency is a goal, the curriculum planners should examine how a new or improved curriculum could help achieve this goal of increasing communicative competency.

It has been my experience that in order to create an effective curriculum it is also desirable to focus on our students' needs and abilities, after we have clarified what it is we want to do. We can then begin to tailor our curriculum to fit both our departmental goals and the Ministry of Education's stated policy objectives and requirements with the students' goals and aspirations.

With this in mind I would then suggest addressing these type of questions before attempting to make a curriculum: What do the students *want* to learn, and have we asked them what they want to learn or made an attempt to find out? How can we, or our curriculum, accomodate their goals? What do they *need* to learn? What are the Ministry of Education's requirements? What about Teaching and Secretarial liscense requirements? What are the students required to learn and why? What can they do with what we are teaching them? How can we make it more useful and interesting for them? What is the level of our students? Are the courses and material we are proposing to offer the students at the appropriate level? Have we determined their ability to learn and digest the material we will teach them?

Once we have determined our goals and have an understanding of our students' aspirations and abilities we can then begin writing a curriculum that will attempt to realize these goals. After our curriculum goals have been established and clarified we can focus on setting some specific objectives we would like our students to achieve and then determine criteria to evaluate both our students progress and our own performance.

### **DEPARTMENTAL GOALS**

Some possible goals for an English Language department that would like a curriculum that facilitates communicative competence in the students could be: 1) Provide and facilitate an academic environment that presents English as a tool for communication. 2) Provide enough practice for basic English functions for all students, in all skill areas. 3) Accommodate exceptionally motivated students in their desire to increase their communicative competency (To the level of a low-intermediate or intermediate EFL student). 4) Instill confidence in students as speakers of English and help remove barriers associated with speaking English and communicating with foreigners. 5) Help students develop learning strategies that will assist them as language learners; try to make our students become active participants in the learning process. 6) Expose students to English speaking cultures.

### **PROVIDE AND FACILITATE A COMFORTABLE AND SECURE ACADEMIC ENVIRONMENT THAT PRESENTS ENGLISH AS A TOOL FOR COMMUNICATION, IN ALL SKILL AREAS**

Most of our incoming students' exposure to English has been completely unrelated to speaking, realistically writing in, or the actual use of English. An initial task, before any real teaching can be done is to change their perception of English and the way it could be studied and used. How can this be done? Japanese staff could talk to their students in English. This would provide the students with excellent role models for speaking English while demonstrating that English is a language that is accessable to Japanese. Japanese teachers could relate their language learning experiences and difficulties to the students as well. During conversation classes teachers should try and talk to all students for a few minutes (individually or in two's and three's) during the first few sessions to break the ice and let the students develop some degree of confidence by actually exchanging information with a teacher in English.

Although Japanese teachers should do this as well, it is important that native speakers do this early on in the course. This helps the students feel secure in using English and demonstrates

to them that they do have the capability to use English with a foreigner.

During these initial sessions, when the students are taking that big step forward of expressing themselves in English, all teachers should de-emphasize mistakes! This is important when attempting to create an environment that encourages rather than intimidates the students from experimenting with a new language. When teachers do correct they could employ a Community Language Learning style of correcting (subtly repeating the phrase, as if reconfirming information). I stress the need to de-emphasize mistakes because a fear of mistakes is a major inhibitor of Japanese students from expressing themselves. I try to convince my students that mistakes are an essential part of the language learning process and at times even reward them for making mistakes. I remind them that if they have not made a mistake then they probably have not said anything either.

### **PROVIDE ENOUGH PRACTICE IN BASIC ENGLISH FUNCTIONS FOR ALL STUDENTS**

We should provide enough practice for basic English functions for all students. We should use and teach basic English. Realistic goals should be set. Given that this is the first time that our students have been exposed to English as a device for communication they should be taught as if they have no active English. If incoming college students were to master their first year junior high school material they would be functionally competent in English and could communicate with native speakers. We should concentrate on providing more practice for these basic functions and instilling enough confidence in students to actually try to use them (Information gap activities can be ideal for increasing students confidence; by completing a task through English they have concrete evidence of their success in communicating). To discourage boredom and repetitiveness but continuing to reinforce the same basic functions we should try to keep our activities as varied and realistic as possible (Ur, 88).

Although it is part of our responsibilities as educators in general to broaden our students' horizons and expose them to important issues we should find out what interests the students and what they want to talk about. If they really want to talk about shopping and fashion, should we teach them about the environment, nuclear disarmament or Taro's father's observations on the cultural differences in corporate life while working for an American company versus a Japanese company? We should also consider our students' abilities. Is it fair to expect a student to understand material that a professor has difficulty with? Or even an educated native speaker?

### **ACCOMMODATE EXCEPTIONALLY MOTIVATED STUDENTS**

When possible resources should be made available for exceptionally motivated students. This could include a departmental library which encourages reading for leisure and extra chatting sessions after school hours (English Lounge). Extra classes that would help students prepare for TOEC or TOEFL examinations could be set up (While these exams are not related to improving communication they are goal specific and would demonstrate the department's commitment to raising standards and the students' overall English ability). Speech and composition contests could be organized as well. If feasible and deemed desirable students could be streamed.

### **INSTILL CONFIDENCE IN STUDENTS AS SPEAKERS OF ENGLISH AND REMOVE BARRIERS ASSOCIATED WITH SPEAKING ENGLISH AND COMMUNICATING WITH FOREIGNERS.**

Many students have never been in close proximity with a foreigner. Perceptions that foreigners are a race of beings with whom communication is all but impossible still exists. A conversation class with forty students may not be the ideal venue to dispel these misperceptions, but by circulating and simply greeting as many students as possible and spending a few minutes with students in pairs or threes during each class the teacher not only humanizes the 'giakokujin no sensei' but humanizes the language as well. As noted above Japanese students are very self-conscious of their mistakes, therefore teachers should refrain from correcting during these sessions. If done at all it should be limited to times when communication is hindered and done as gently as possible.

### **HELP STUDENTS DEVELOP LEARNING STRATEGIES THAT WILL ASSIST THEM AS LANGUAGE LEARNERS**

Students should be reminded that this is the first time they have heard or used real English, and that they should not panic if they do not understand everything or even most of what they are being exposed to. We should try to make our students become active participants in the learning process by interacting with the language. Students should be taught to listen for key phrases and to guess or try and fill in the information that is missing, very early in the course. Students should be encouraged to ask for information and to say that they do not understand. Learning to ask for and to confirm or reaffirm information is an important strategy when acquiring a new language. Students should be encouraged to directly question the teacher when they do not understand, and rewarded when they do. This is a more economical use of classroom time and a more effective learning strategy than the common method of conferring for 3-4 minutes with friends for the proper response to "How are you?".

Summarizing and speculating activities can be used to achieve these goals in writing and reading classes. By summarizing a reading passage the student is required to examine a piece of information and state what she understands about it. By speculating on the end of a story or article the student is responsible for understanding the passage and then creating her own language to finish the story. The student must actively engage the language in each of these activities (A. Raimes 88).

### **EXPOSE STUDENTS TO ENGLISH SPEAKING CULTURES.**

As language and culture are interwoven it makes little sense to try and teach language in a cultural vacuum. Cross-cultural activities can and should be employed in conversation class.

In many colleges courses designed to teach foreign culture are offered. Classes that teach English speaking culture should be taught by people who have actually experienced life in foreign countries or as an alternative by native speakers who have had enough cross-cultural experiences in Japan. Often the emphasis in these classes is on cultural differences and communication styles and cross-cultural faux pas. Although it is vital to understand these and how to avoid cross-cultural misunderstandings more emphasis could be placed on how to bridge these gaps.

### CHALLENGES RELATED TO THESE GOALS

While the majority of incoming students do want to learn English, they soon realize that a minimum amount of work is required to receive a passing grade while a fair amount of effort is needed to become competent in a foreign language. Students also quickly realize that conditions are not always optimal (large classes, etc.) for learning a foreign language and that a learning style that they are unaccustomed to is needed to acquire a moderate degree of competency. Students also find out that they must expose themselves to a certain amount of risk and take the giant step of expressing themselves, in English, in front of their peers. When this becomes apparent the number of students who continue to be *truly* motivated and *willing to invest the amount of effort required to become minimally competent in a foreign language and more importantly take the required risks is small*. One challenge is to identify these students and to devise a plan to accommodate them without completely ignoring the others. When possible we should present material that sufficiently challenges the motivated students but can keep the less motivated students entertained (and hopefully they will learn at their own pace). I also try to have extra material and activities on hand for the students who finish the tasks earlier.

Another challenge with incoming students is their idea of what English really is and their formal experience studying it. Their formal experience with English has generally been unrelated to the actual use of English. We should attempt to change their perception of English and convince them that it is a legitimate avenue of communication in which they can participate. Students' perceptions about how English can be studied should also be addressed. This is necessary as most communicative centered activities are new to our students and go against the grain of how they have been trained to study and behave in the classroom. Students must learn that they will be responsible for their own learning and that they must become active participants in the learning process, in order to successfully learn the skills required to become competent in a second language. This is a concept that Japanese students have difficulty adjusting to. Throughout their student lives they have been passive learners, absorbing knowledge from the teacher who dispenses it. They are now being presented with language and asked to use it, manipulate it and speculate about it. The role of the teacher has changed as well, from dispenser of knowledge to facilitator or demonstrator of a skill.

A final challenge is providing enough *meaningful* opportunities to learn how to master basic functions before we expose them to more complicated material. Although this is the first time that our students have been exposed to English as a device for communication they have been exposed to a great deal of English. Once they have displayed an ability to use the most basic functions we can then begin to explore ways to utilize this reservoir of vocabulary and grammar that students have been exposed to in junior and senior high school. If students were to successfully master the vocabulary and functions they were taught in junior high school they would attain a degree of communicative competency which would enable them to communicate on a low-intermediate level. The challenge is to find ways to reinforce these functions, build upon these skills and instill confidence in their ability to communicate while not overloading them with material that is far too advanced to do them any good. We should question the rationale behind constantly building upon a weak foundation without reinforcing that foundation. Just because

something has been taught or at one point memorized (most likely on the evening prior to an examination) does not ensure that it has been learned.

## STUDENT OBJECTIVES

### OBJECTIVES FOR 1ST YEAR STUDENTS.

#### CONVERSATION

In these classes we should teach and provide lots of practice for basic functions. I would recommend two sets of objectives for Conversation classes, one for grammar usage and another for speaking/listening abilities, or fluency.

Speaking/Listening; Asking for directions, ordering meals, making simple requests, describing people, talking about hobbies and shopping language. After one year the students should be able to perform these simple functions and requests with an adequate degree of confidence and fluency. Any higher expectations probably can not be attained for most of our students.

At the beginning of the course I would recommend concentrating more on listening comprehension as increasing listening comprehension involves less of a risk. Cassette recordings that supplement a grammar or functional lesson can be used to increase listening comprehension but story-telling and closed-caption films present language as it really is, in a less contrived atmosphere. When a teacher tells his class a story, he is sharing information and experiences with his students. This is good early on in the course as students can just sit back and listen, they can relate to, react to or discuss what they like and no risk is involved (although task involvement is eventually necessary).

Closed caption films and animated cartoons are good for increasing listening comprehension as well as reading skills. Closed caption films force the student to actively participate in the learning process. The student may not be able to comprehend the English she hears, but must read (quickly) in order to find out the story. During these activities there should be an ongoing dialogue between teacher and students about the film, instead of just sitting back and watching it. Attention should be drawn to the connection between the written language and the situation. Teachers should encourage the students to guess what will happen next and ask if they understand a certain word or if they know another way of expressing a certain phrase. Dialogue from the film could be incorporated into subsequent lessons. Optimal time seems to be 15-20 minutes per lesson. Attention begins to wane early as this can be a tiring activity if students are participating fully.

Teaching a song through a cloze exercise is an enjoyable way to end a conversation class and can improve listening comprehension as well.

Grammar. Despite extensively studying proper form and structure, incoming students seem to have very little knowledge of the usage of these structures and the meaning behind them (or they can't demonstrate them), let alone control and successfully manipulate the most basic of grammar functions. Some grammar goals for a first year English conversation class could be; proper understanding of and usage of present, past and future tenses, prepositions of location, adjectives, adverbs of frequency, comparative and superlative structures.

## COMPOSITION

My experience teaching writing shows that the majority of incoming students at most junior colleges have never written in English. They really do not know what is expected of them when asked to do a simple unstructured exercise based on creating (as opposed to translating from or into) English writing.

The main challenge in composition classes is fostering creativity. Keeping journals, writing letters, telling/listening to stories, and anything that encourages expression of feelings should be used. Journals usually work very well but must be responded to by the teacher. By focusing comments on the content or message in the journal the teacher is demonstrating to the student that she actually is communicating. It is my belief that by concentrating too much on grammar and over-correcting students' compositions that writing is actually stymied. By focusing solely on the mechanics (grammar) of our students' writing we overlook the writing itself. I feel that it is much more important to encourage second language learners to get their ideas on paper first. By constantly cluttering up their papers with red marks and corrections we obscure the message that the student is trying to communicate.

Although objectives can be established by many criteria I use creativity and the students' ability to express themselves as a measure of progress. This is admittedly not a very concrete tool for evaluating a students' progress but as a lack of creativity is a major problem our students face when trying to write I feel that this is what we should stress most.

## READING

Students' reading abilities are also quite varied but a realistic reading objective for most students would be to read and comprehend a story that has been abridged to the 400-500 word vocabulary level, without using a dictionary. Again this might seem too low of an objective relative to the amount of vocabulary studied in high school but more accurately reflects what was actually learned.

Unfortunately not much reading goes on in many reading classes at junior colleges, but plenty of direct translation takes place, subsequently students are not always given the opportunity to learn real reading skills. Students are often presented with text that is far above their level of comprehension and while not required to actually read the text, asked to translate it word for word.

When choosing material for reading classes we should first ask ourselves: What is the definition of reading? Why do we often give students material that is much too difficult for them? What purpose does it serve? What benefit can a student gain by reading something she can not understand? Would it be more productive to allow the students to read something that better reflects their abilities? That allows the student to interact with the reading? That allows the student to understand the text, without constantly flipping through a dictionary? How enjoyable is it to read something you can not understand? Isn't one of the purposes of reading to entertain? Wouldn't it be better to encourage our students to read voluntarily by demonstrating that reading in English can be fun? Are our students really reading when it takes them hours to rifle through a dictionary translating every second or third word? How much do they actually comprehend?

I recommend offering courses that teach reading *skills* during the first year, I would avoid



literature classes until the second year. Courses and materials that are designed to wean the students from their dictionaries should be used. Students should be encouraged to read the whole paragraph instead of dissecting it word for word and then searching for meaning in each individual word. They should be taught how to infer the meaning of words and material they do not understand, using the portions of the text they do understand as a blueprint for the meaning of the entire passage.

We should build upon the students' current level by incrementally increasing their comprehension level as well as the speed or rate at which they read and base our objectives on increasing their individual levels. Timed readings work well. A Reading Speed Chart has been developed by Doshida University Professor Kenji Kitao through which the students can monitor their progress. I use a variety of very simple readers, (400-500 word vocabulary level at first) from which the students can choose a story they like. I use these to encourage reading for fun and comprehension, and if possible, without a dictionary. I use The Abridged Oxford Bookworm Series, which is comprised of numerous English classics and contemporary literature written for EFL students at various levels.

## OBJECTIVES FOR SECOND YEAR STUDENTS

### CONVERSATION

Students should continue practicing the functions learned in the first year as well as learning new functions. Activities that reinforce and incorporate these functions into new language should be used.

Speaking/Listening. Students should be able to express likes and dislikes, discuss future goals and begin to state their opinions. I would continue using closed caption videos and EFL cassettes, Grapevine, On Track etc. for listening comprehension.

Grammar. Again, continue reinforcing functions learned in the first year. Students should be able to consistently and correctly use past progressive and perfect tenses, adverbs, and the first conditional. I feel that if students are not overburdened with more complex grammar structures and given enough practice and instruction on how to use these functions this goal could be attainable for most junior college students.

### COMPOSITION

I recommend providing material that can further stimulate the second year students to produce writing that reflects their feelings and opinions, without inhibiting their creativity by emphasizing mistakes. I have found that while Japanese students are reluctant to express themselves verbally on controversial (or even not so controversial) subjects they do have opinions and will express them quite fully and succinctly on paper. I have presented material to second year students on many subjects, such as AIDS, environmental destruction and Comfort Women that have produced some very thoughtful writings. I think that it is important to remember that we should still respond primarily to the content of the students writing in order to create a dialogue with them through written English. This is not to recommend overlooking the students' grammatical errors completely but we could also make our corrections in a more communicative fashion. We could ask the student why this particular verb is used incorrectly or point out the

major errors and have her explain what is wrong with them.

#### READING

I recommend teaching literature during the second year. This would allow the students to employ the reading skills that were taught during the first year. Once again the key is hitting the correct level and the levels are varied. The Oxford Bookworms series is ideal for teaching abridged classics at many different levels. If possible two stories should be read. One for the whole class which the teacher recommends and the other that students select and read individually.

#### CHALLENGES RELATED TO THESE OBJECTIVES

Classes are usually too large. Thirty to sixty students in a class is not conducive to providing an atmosphere where students can try to comfortably communicate in a foreign language. Heavy workload; students are too tired to make much of an effort to listen to someone speaking in a foreign language and try to comprehend what he/she is saying, let alone try to produce his/her own English. The levels of motivation are varied in most classes. Some students are very keen to experiment and participate in the activities and enjoy being challenged but in the same class there is usually a large group whose attitude is, 'We 'd like to learn English and we'll try a bit but....college is playtime!' Then there is sometimes a handful of students whose main reason for being in the classroom is to check their split ends and catch up on some sleep. There is a low level of risk taking so students' are reluctant to speak to each other in English. Students are also reluctant to speak to each other in Japanese.

Students' are unfamiliar with English as a tool for communication and are reluctant to interact with the language. Students are often unaware of what is expected of them and unfamiliar with a style of teaching that requires them to think independently and then volunteer the results of that independent thinking.

Students are unfamiliar with and unexposed to real English, often text/dialogue studied consists of material that is inconsistent with real English.

Many incoming students (second year students as well) seem to have major difficulty following and comprehending simple instructions, whether oral or written. I do not know the exact reason for this, given their extensive formal training in high school and junior high school, but would guess that it stems from their unfamiliarity with the concept of drawing concrete information from English and an automation style of writing everything down without giving much thought to comprehending it or even looking at it for meaning or relativity. Ideas that would train students to look at instructions and English as a whole as something that can be interacted with and as something from which information can be extracted should be considered. If we bring English down to a plausible level of comprehension and present it as such, students can begin to view English text as something from which information can be acquired.

#### INCORPORATING NATIVE SPEAKERS' CURRICULUM WITH JAPANESE TEACHERS' CURRICULUM

Traditionally Japanese teachers have taught the more pedantic courses such as grammar and phonology while the native speakers have taught only the conversation courses. Why shouldn't

Japanese teachers teach conversation? Wouldn't demonstrating that Japanese people can acquire a high degree of fluency make English conversation seem more attainable to some students? Why can't foreign teachers teach grammar classes? Why does there seem to be an unwritten law that states speaking English to the students is the sole domain of native speakers?

While at times the goals of the Japanese instructors' classes might not always jell with the goals of native speakers' curriculum and might at times even seem to conflict with those goals it is possible and desirable to coordinate and possibly consolidate the two curriculae when feasible. As an example native speakers could consolidate and provide opportunities to practice whatever grammar is being taught by Japanese staff into their lessons. The reverse could also be done, Japanese staff could use their grammar classes to explain more clearly the functions and structures presented in the foreign teachers' classes. Of course this would require prior consultation and planning by all teachers concerned. A truly comprehensive and integrated goal-oriented curriculum is a difficult but not an unattainable goal.

### **RELATED CHALLENGES**

Channels of communication are not always open. Teachers rarely discuss or exchange ideas and information about what happens within their classes. During curriculum meetings the substance of the courses are rarely discussed. Each teacher tends to operate within his/her own sphere; no one seems to be aware of what is being taught in each other's classes, therefore it is difficult to coordinate individual curriculum.

Communicative instruction is not always taken seriously or given much thought by many Japanese colleagues. Japanese instructors rarely use English in their own classes. Instruction is about English rather than through English; this could reinforce the feeling that English is not really a feasible vehicle for communication. At the same time foreign instructors' classes are not always taken seriously, they are looked upon as fun and games, not as authentic lessons. Conversation classes are viewed as a supplement to the real task of teaching linguistics, grammar, translation and more vocabulary. Being conversant in the language does not seem to be a primary goal but an incidental one.

Emphasis is still placed primarily on non-communicative exercises and materials; grammar translation, explaining complicated structures, linguistic terms and grammar functions as opposed to providing instruction and practice for actually using English at a more manageable and comprehensible level. Although there definitely is a proper place for this type of instruction, have we sufficiently explored the reasons why we are teaching it and the purpose that it serves? Can it be taught in a more communicative and/or relevant fashion? Could these courses be made more goal-specific or practical? (Such as practice for the STEP Test or TOEFL).

Another indicator of how much emphasis is placed on communication is the college's entrance examination. Unfortunately there is little evidence of any. In his study on English entrance examinations in Japan Dr. J.D. Brown (University of Hawaii) found that none of those surveyed had anything to do with evaluating applicants' potential for real communication but concentrated on directly translating and testing the applicants' ability to answer different types of questions. Consequently many applicants who have an aptitude for learning English are being eliminated and those accepted are being accepted on the basis of an entirely different set of

criteria than one which could determine their language learning skills. These types of non-communicative tests are self-perpetuating and also discourage communicative style teaching in high schools. High school students' and their teachers' main objectives are to pass the examinations, which are unrelated to communication. This not only discourages high schools from using a more communicative centered curriculum (and preparing them for the type of activities they might encounter in conversation classes at college) but also helps perpetuate the study of English for reasons unrelated to communication. They are often then presented with this type of English instruction again, in college.

## **A BROAD OUTLINE FOR A CURRICULUM DESIGNED TO INCREASE THE ABILITY TO COMMUNICATE IN ENGLISH**

### **FIRST YEAR COURSES:**

Two or Three Conversation Classes. These classes should be designed to provide many opportunities to practice using and listening to basic English functions. These could be; introductions, greetings, travel language, survival, shopping, restaurant, etc. I would suggest two classes taught by a native speaker and one by a Japanese teacher. I also stress the need to speak English as much as possible.

One or Two Grammar related courses. These grammar related courses should be used to supplement or complement the conversation courses. The instructors of these courses should not only teach about the various functions but demonstrate how to correctly use these grammar functions and also provide time to practice using these functions. These functions should also be relatively basic functions and should accurately reflect the level of the students ability. The teacher of these courses should communicate closely with the conversation teacher and work as close as possible together. The key is not to teach too far above the students ability.

One Writing course. Concentrate on actually creating writing and expressing one's thoughts on paper. Teach some of the mechanics but keep it simple.

One Reading Course. Choose the level correctly. Let's avoid forcing our students to 'read' material that is too difficult.

Electives. Students could choose from a wide range of courses related to Culture, Cross-Cultural Communications and Encounters, The History of English, Sociolinguistics, etc. These courses would more than likely be taught in Japanese but could be made available in English too. Extra conversation or writing courses could also be provided for students who show an interest.

### **SECOND YEAR COURSES**

Two or Three Conversation classes. These classes should be designed to reinforce functions learned in the first year while incorporating more complicated functions into their repertoire. Students should begin learning how to express likes and dislikes, discuss future goals and begin

to state their opinions. I would continue using closed caption videos and EFL cassettes, Grapevine, On Track etc. for listening comprehension.

Two or Three Grammar related classes. One or two of these grammar related or general English classes could be used to reinforce and complement the grammar that is presented in the conversation classes. A very effective textbook designed to provide practice for grammar functions is Penny Ur's Grammar Practice. The other class could be made more goal-oriented, Eiken, STEP test, TOEFL, etc.

One Writing Course. Continue encouraging expression of feelings and opinions. I encourage daily diary writing. Newscast and controversial subjects, if presented correctly, are extremely useful in generating written responses and assisting students to 'make' writing. Activities designed to coax students away from dictionaries, such as timed speed writings, help students become more effective writers while increasing their active vocabulary.

One Reading Course. British or American Literature or some contemporary writers. I would continue using something from the Abridged Oxford Bookworm series, or a similar series.

Electives. I would suggest asking the students in the first year (floating a survey?) as to their preferences for second year electives. Some possibilities could be; Media English, Film, Journalism (reading magazines, newspapers, ect.) more reading, writing, Cross-Cultural courses or more examination practice classes.

## CONCLUSION

While the Ministry of Education has expressed a desire to increase communicative competency throughout the school system the education establishment seems unable to make a real effort to remove one of the major impediments to realizing this goal. This impediment is the material being presented to the students. The issue is not how much more English grammar is taught, or how many more foreigners we import to teach conversation courses but to seriously examine the curriculum. There is still little indication that curriculae have been designed with a goal of increasing the students ability to speak, write and interact in English.

When we create a course without clearly defining its academic goals and the reasons why we are teaching it and fail to establish objectives by which our success and the students' can be measured we are doing little to create an effective program. If we continue to ignore our students actual abilities to effectively acquire language skills without evaluating their abilities to demonstrate them, and by continually presenting material that is not designed to increase communicative competence we will more than likely continue to produce graduates who will be asking "Why can't I speak English after all these years of studying it?" "And we can only answer 'Because we never taught you to'".

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