

Classroom Behavior

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Introduction by Brett Reynolds

Junior high school is often a difficult time in students' lives and teaching there can be equally difficult. According to *The Asahi Shimbun* English edition (August 25-26, 2001, p. 19) there were 40,374 incidents involving student violence at publicly run schools in fiscal 2000. Roughly three quarters of these incidents were committed by junior high school students.

When faced with behavioral problems, two common reflexes are blaming someone, be it students, their parents, other teachers, or even yourself, or passing the problem off to someone else. Unfortunately, these are also two of the best ways to disempower yourself. The effective alternative to both of these paths is to seek solutions instead.

If you are not Japanese, you may be starting with a lack of knowledge both of what is considered appropriate behavior and how inappropriate behavior is typically addressed in

your school. The best way to empower yourself is to find out. Because the answers will be different in each school, the best way to find out is to ask.

Beyond your immediate situation, there is a great deal of material available to help teachers deal with discipline and behavioral issues but unfortunately there is little that specifically speaks to English teachers in Japanese junior high schools. Here is some that I have found helpful:

While not Japan specific, the FLTeach mailing list has a helpful page of suggestions for language teachers at <http://www.cortland.edu/flteach/FAQ/FAQ-Discipline.html>

An article that is Japan specific, but aimed more at the tertiary level can be found at <http://www.aitech.ac.jp/~iteslj/Lessons/Sasaki-Comm.html>

A very comprehensive (but badly designed) site is

<http://www.behavioradvisor.com/>

A decent overview of the Japanese school system (which touches occasionally on behavioral issues) can be found at <http://www.ed.gov/pubs/JapanCaseStudy/>

Similarly, *Educating hearts and Minds* by Catherine Lewis (1995, Cambridge University Press) gives an eye opening look at discipline in the students early school life.

One more recommended resource is *Improving school behaviour* by Chris Watkins and Patsy Wagner (2000, Paul Chapman Publishing, London). It suggests excellent ways to approach the issue, though from a British viewpoint.

Finally, to get a more local view of this issue, I went to Helene Jarmol Uchida, founder of Little America and LATEM. The following is her response:



Behavior in the junior high or high school English classroom reflects a student's attitude about self, peers, teacher and the subject matter. Many, many variables combine to affect the behavior of adolescents in the classroom on a given day. Some variables are within a teacher's control, such as lesson plans, room atmosphere, materials, seating arrangements, class size, etc. But some are beyond a teacher's touch. Each and every student brings to class what he/she experiences at home or in the outside world, which is usually an unknown area for the teacher.

Setting up the circle

I received the bulk of my base teaching in America and, in essence, was trained by my adolescent students in Brentwood, New York. Brentwood was and still is a very

The newest CoS for Middle Schools, Foreign Language Section: What's New?

The Course of Study (CoS) is published by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (MEXT) which outlines national minimum standards for each subject at various grade levels. The CoS is revised every few years. The most recent revision was published in March 1999 and takes effect in April 2002. This article discusses the differences between the new and CoS and the current one.

As with a horoscope, the CoS can be interpreted to fit a variety of purposes. Thus, commenting on changes in direction is rather difficult as neither the original direction, nor the new one is clearly delineated. However, there are three areas that are worth comment. The first is a cut in the contents of what students must study. The second is a shift in emphasis away from written language and towards spoken language and away from an academic study of the language towards a more practical approach to teaching and learning. The final change is a decentralization of power away from the MEXT toward schools, teachers, and textbook publishers.

A cut in content?

It has been widely reported (e.g., *Asahi Shimbun*, editorial 11/28) that there will be a 30% cut in the contents of what is to be taught. However, it is difficult to imagine how this 30% will translate into actual changes. In looking at the two courses of study, it is difficult to quantify this 30%. The clearest change is in vocabulary.

Under the list of "Language Elements", vocabulary has been reduced by about 10% (from "approximately 1000 words" to "approximately 900 words") over the three years. This does not support the 30% number. The other major change here is that the list of 507 required words (see Bowles,

2001a for a discussion) has been cut to only 100 words. However, this represents a reduction of control by the MEXT, rather than a reduction in content.

It is more difficult to quantify grammar and other language elements. However, the list of possible sentence patterns remains unchanged and the list of grammatical items for study is virtually identical.

These findings are directly at odds with the widely reported cuts. One possible explanation is that certain subjects are being cut more than others. Another is that the cuts will be made at the level of the textbooks and not in the CoS itself. Finally, it may be that the MEXT intends to implement the change simply by cutting the amount of class time through the decision to eliminate Saturday lessons.

A change in emphasis to spoken English for communication

The widely reported cut in content is hard to find in the CoS. However, there is an obvious shift in emphasis away from written English and towards the spoken language. Another shift is the move away from English as an object of study and towards English as a tool for communication. Surprisingly, this has not been widely discussed in the media.

In the new CoS, section 3, "Syllabus design and treatment of contents", sub-section (1) B states, "in each year, emphasis should be placed on listening and speaking when selecting from 2 (1) Language-use activities." This contrasts with the previous instruction that, "in conducting language-use activities in listening, speaking, reading and writing, priority may be given to activities in one or more skills according to students' learning stages, but no particular emphasis should be placed on activities in any one or more skills over the three-year peri-

od..." This is perhaps the clearest evidence that the MEXT is trying to shift the focus away from written English towards spoken English.

Another piece of evidence is found in the new CoS under section 2, sub-section 2, part (1), A), line (b), which states that students should "listen to English spoken or read in a natural way and understand the explicitly stated information and main points." This contrasts with the previous, "...listen to words or sentences and understand the meanings." Note the inclusion of the phrase, "in a natural way".

Furthermore, paragraphs B) and C) which follow, have no equivalent section in the previous CoS:

B) Communication activities should be conducted so as to allow students to consider and use expressions that are suitable for the particular function or situation.

C) Language activities should be designed to illustrate the functions of language or the situation in which it is used, focusing mainly on the following: (a list of functions and situations strongly suggesting spoken language follow. e.g., shopping & requesting)

Another reason to believe there is a new focus on spoken language is the addition, under section 2, sub-section 2, part (3) A) pronunciation, of line b). This states that students should be exposed to and practice "phonological modification during connected speech."

Finally, in section 2, sub-section 2, part (4), line B), the following unprecedented instruction is included: "In teaching the grammar points from (3) D) above, care should be taken that the teaching of grammatical terminology and distinctions of usage not be the focus. Instead, the practical use of the language should take precedence."

All these changes taken together can be seen as a clear indication that the MEXT is pushing for the study of spo-

ken English as a practical tool for real-life communication and is trying to discourage teachers from focusing on the written language as an object of study.

Decentralizing power

The final major change is the decentralization of decision making power away from the MEXT to schools, teachers, and publishers. The reduction of the word list from 507 words to 100 words, as discussed above, is evidence of this shift. Another sign is the elimination of year-by-year objectives. These objectives, which were rather vague and showed no clear progression from first to third year have been replaced by a single, similarly vague set of objectives that apply to all three years. However, the MEXT has given responsibility for setting yearly goals to individual schools and teachers (Section 3, (1) A)).

Summary and Conclusions

This examination of the two courses of study failed to find a significant reduction in the contents of what will be taught, which contradicts the per-

ceptions of the media and the general public. The only obvious reduction was in the number of words to study. It is unclear, however, what will actually happen as many schools are reducing the number of lessons to cope with the loss of Saturday morning classes.

On the other hand, the new CoS does show a clear, perhaps pronounced, move away from classical English language study -- with its focus on written English and attention to grammatical terminology and distinctions of usage -- and an embracing of the study of spoken English as a tool for communication. This is part of a trend that began a few years ago and was evidenced by the addition of an Oral Communication class a number of years ago. However, just as the implementation of OC classes have suffered from vague goals, a reliance on printed textbooks and study materials, and lack of support from teachers, schools, students, and parents, it seems that the MEXT's new emphasis may have little effect on what actually happens in the classrooms. Certainly, the media seem to have failed to notice it.

Finally, the shift of responsibility for choosing vocabulary and setting goals to schools, teachers, and textbook publishers is notable. However, in practice, many teachers rely heavily on the textbook. As a result, the textbook publishers are likely to gain the most influence from this move. Unfortunately, given their past results (see Bowles 2001b for a discussion of some problems with vocabulary. See also Hardy), this is not encouraging.

References

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- Bowles, M. (2001 a). A Quantitative Look at Monbusho's Prescribed Word List. *The Language Teacher*, 25, 9. pp.
- Bowles, M. (2001 b). Problems in treatment of vocabulary in approved jr. high school textbooks: Informing teachers. *ETJ Journal*, 2, 2. pp. 18-19 & 13.
- Hardy, T. (1999). Conflicting Agendas: The making of a junior high English text. *The School House*, 7, 2. Available online: <http://www.esl.sakuragaoka.ac.jp/tsh/7-2/Feature.html>

The Course of Study for Lower Secondary Schools, Section 9: Foreign Languages

Published March 1999 to take effect April 2002.

Translated from the Japanese at <http://www.monbu.go.jp/news/00000317/t-gaiko2.html>
(Note; the section relating to the teacher of languages other than English has been omitted.)
Translation done by Brett Reynolds.

1 Overall Objectives

To deepen students' understanding of language and culture, cultivate their willingness to attempt to communicate in a foreign language, and to develop the fundamentals of practical communication skills, such as listening and speaking in that language.

2 Objectives and contents for each language

1 Objectives

- (1) To familiarize students with listening to English, and to enable them to understand a speaker's intentions when delivered in elementary spoken English.
- (2) To familiarize students with speaking English and enable them to express themselves using elementary spoken English.
- (3) To familiarize students with reading English, and to enable them to understand a writer's intentions when delivered in elementary written English.
- (4) To familiarize students with writing English and enable them to express themselves using elementary written English.

2 Contents

- (1) Language-use activities
The following language-use

activities should be conducted over the three years in order to develop students' abilities to understand English and express themselves in it.

A) Listening

The following activities should be included:

- a) Perceive the features of fundamental spoken English, (e.g., stress, intonation, and pause) and correctly understand what was said.
- b) Listen to English spoken or read in a natural way and understand the explicitly stated information and main points.
- c) Listen to a question, request, etc. and respond appropriately.
- d) Ask a speaker for repetition or clarification in order to achieve comprehension.

B) Speaking

The following activities should be included:

- a) Become familiar with the features of fundamental spoken English, (e.g., stress, intonation, and pause) and to speak with correct pronunciation.
- b) Successfully convey intended meaning (e.g., thoughts or feelings)
- c) Debate or discuss opinions

about a spoken or written text.

- d) Employ various devices such as using connecting words to maintain a conversation.

C) Reading

The following activities should be included:

- a) Correctly identify letters and punctuation and read correctly.
- b) Read silently, considering the written contents, or read aloud with appropriate expression.
- c) Understand the general meaning and main points of various texts (e.g., stories, directions, etc.).
- d) Read a message or letter and understand the writer's intentions, then respond appropriately.

D) Writing

The following activities should be included:

- a) Write correctly with attention to spacing between words and correctly formed letters and punctuation.
- b) Take notes on or write a reaction to a spoken or written text.
- c) Write so as to successfully convey intended meaning (e.g., thoughts or feelings).
- d) Successfully convey intended meaning in a note or letter.

(2) Treatment of language-use activities

A) Overall points for consideration over the three years

During instruction over three years, the following points should be considered:

- a) Authentic language-use activities in which students attempt to exchange ideas and feelings should be conducted so as to promote the comprehension or practice of language elements from (3).

b) Communication activities should be conducted so as to allow students to consider and use expressions that are suitable for the particular function or situation.

c) Language activities should be designed to illustrate the functions of language or the situation in which it is used, focusing mainly on the following:

(Examples of language situations)

Situations where a characteristic expression is often used:

- greeting
- self-introduction
- answering the telephone
- shopping
- giving directions
- travel
- eating
- etc.

Situations that are related to students' everyday lives:

- life at home
- study and activity in a school
- local events
- etc.

(Examples of language functions)

Expanding on idea or giving information:

- expressing opinions
- explaining
- reporting
- announcing
- describing
- etc.

Initiating or responding in conversation:

- questioning
- requesting
- inviting
- offering
- checking
- promising
- agreeing and disagreeing
- accepting and refusing

Conveying feelings:

- expressing thanks
- complaining
- praising
- apologizing
- etc.

B) Points for consideration regarding students' level

With respect to the students' level, the following points should be considered:

a) Language-use activities in the 1st year:

Considering that students are studying English for the first time, promoting a positive attitude to communication should be a main goal. In doing so, allow the students to perform activities using language, situations, and functions that relate to the students' immediate concrete surroundings.

Include activities that give students a chance to use simple expressions in attempting to communicate about their own feelings, and their immediate surroundings.

b) Language-use activities in the 2nd year:

Allow students to perform language-use activities which build on the situations and functions studied in the first year. In addition, include topics that require students to attempt to communicate about the relationship between facts and their own judgments.

c) Language-use activities in the 3rd year:

Allow students to perform language-use activities which build on the situations and functions studied in the second year. In addition, include topics that require students to attempt to communicate about their own ideas, opinions, etc.

(3) Language elements

In carrying out the language-use activities stated in (1), language elements suitable for the attainment of the objectives stated in 1 above should be chosen from among the following elements:

A) Pronunciation

a) Contemporary standard

pronunciation

- b) Phonological modification during connected speech
- c) Basic word, phrase, and sentence stress
- d) Basic sentence intonation
- e) Basic sentence pauses.

B) Letters and punctuation

- a) The printed capital and small letters of the alphabet
- b) Basic punctuation including periods, question marks, commas, quotation marks, and exclamation marks

C) Vocabulary, collocations, and idiomatic expressions

- a) Roughly 900 words including the words in List 1, as well as basic words related to everyday life, such as seasons, months, days of the week, time, the weather, numbers (cardinal and ordinal), and family.
- b) The most basic collocations
- c) Basic idiomatic expressions including: excuse me, I see, I'm sorry, you're welcome, for example

D) Grammar

- a) Sentences
 1. Simple, compound, and complex sentences
 2. Affirmative and negative declarative sentences
 3. Affirmative and negative imperative sentences
 4. Interrogatives that begin with a verb or auxiliary verb such as can, do, may, etc., that contain or and that begin with an interrogative such as how, what, when, where, which, who, whose, why

b) Sentence Patterns

1. SV

	noun
1 S be	pronoun
	adjective
2. SV

	noun
	adjective
3. SVO

	noun
	pronoun
1 SV	gerund
	to infinitive
	how to infinitive
	that clause

2 SV + what clause

4. SV + indirect O + direct O

- 1 SV + iO +

	noun
	pronoun
- 2 SV + iO + | how to infinitive |

5. SVOC

- 1 SVOC

	noun
	pronoun

6. Other Patterns

- 1 There + be ...
- 2 It + be ... (for...) to infinitive
- 3 S + tell, want, etc. + O + to infinitive

c) Pronoun

1. Pronouns for grammatical person, directions, questions, and quantity
2. Basic relative pronouns including subject relative pro-

nouns (e.g., that, which, who) and object relative pronouns (e.g., that, which)

d) Verb tense and aspect: simple present and past, present and past progressive, present perfect, auxiliaries expressing future and present time

- e) Comparative adjectives and adverbs
- f) Basic infinitives
- g) Basic gerunds
- h) Present and past participles: adjective use
- i) Passive voice: present and past tenses

(4) Treatment of language elements

A) The following grammar points from (3) D) above should be taught for comprehension only (not production)

- b) 3. 2
- b) 4. 2
- c) 2.

B) In teaching the grammar points from (3) D) above care should be taken that the teaching of grammatical terminology and distinctions of usage not be the focus. Instead, the practical use of the language should take precedence.

3 Syllabus design and treatment of the contents

(1) In designing the syllabus, careful consideration should be given to the following:

A) Each school should define goals to meet the needs and abilities of the particular students and area and attempt to realize those goals over the three years.

B) In each year, emphasis should be placed on listening and speaking when selecting from 2 "(1) Language-use activities".

C) When selecting contents from 2 "(3) Language elements", teachers should gradually work from easier to more difficult items according to the students' level. Similarly, effective teaching such as initially teaching for comprehension, and later for production should be used.

D) Instruction in pronunciation should continuously address

the contents of 2 (3) "A) Pronunciation", with practice focused on speaking and listening. In addition, where appropriate, instruction may include the use of a phonetic alphabet.

E) Instruction in handwriting may include cursive script as well as printing depending on the students' workload.

F) The choice of vocabulary, collocations, and idiomatic expressions should be guided by their frequency with the most common items being targeted for mastery.

G) Students should become accustomed to basic dictionary used when necessary.

H) Care should be taken to incorporate the effective use of computers, computer networks, and other educational technology and to obtain the cooperation of native speakers of English as is appropriate given the students' ability and the contents of the lessons. In addition, pair work and group work should be employed where appropriate.

(2) In order to enhance students' practical English communication ability, teaching materials should include sufficient language situations and functions. Such materials should focus on the everyday life of English users, peoples of the world, and Japanese people, their customs and habits, stories, geography, history, etc. From these, materials should be selected from a variety of perspectives to address the students' developmental stage and interests.

A) To encourage the understanding of various viewpoints and ideals and to foster evenhanded judgment and open-mindedness.

B) To deepen students' understanding of the lifestyles and culture of peoples of world and Japan while raising their interest in language and culture and foster a respectful attitude towards them.

C) To deepen international understanding from a broad view and increase students' awareness of themselves as Japanese living in a global society while supporting a spirit of international collaboration.

List 1

a	during	my	these
about	each	near	they
across	either	nothing	this
after	everyone	of	those
all	everything	off	through
am	for	on	to
among	from	one	under
an	has	or	until(till)
and	have	other	up
another	he	our	us
anyone	her	ours	we
anything	hers	over	what
are	him	shall	when
as	his	she	where
at	how	should	which
because	I	since	who
before	if	so	whose
between	in	someone	why
both	into	something	will
but	is	than	with
by	it	that	without
can	may	the	would
could	me	their	you
do	mine	them	your
down	must	then	yours