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Fostering “Deeper Learning” of English in Japan’s Junior High Schools

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Abstract

This paper introduces some suggestions that may lead to the realization of “deeper learning.” In the first section, it briefly compares the former and the next courses of study, and discusses changes that junior high schools will face upon the complete implementation of the new course of study in 2021. Section Two deals with the new learning styles that will be expected when “proactive, interactive, and deeper learning” become the viewpoints of the instructional improvement. In Section Three, five conditions that might make conventional communication activities “deeper” are proposed. In Section Four, some hints are proposed that may induce deeper learning using a conventional classroom procedure.

Keywords

junior high school, course of study, deeper learning

One of the key features in the Japanese Education Ministry’s 2017 *Course of Study for Junior High Schools* (*Chūgakkō gakushūshidōyōryō*), is to try and foster “proactive, interactional, and deeper learning” (*shutaiteki, taiwateki de fukai manabi* (2017, p. 136)). Proactive learning means the active and voluntary involvement of the learners into communication activities in the classroom. In order to achieve the goal of each communication activity, they

need to exchange information. The conversation to exchange information to achieve the goal of communication requires mutual “proactive” efforts, and it naturally becomes “interactional.” Thus, in classrooms focusing on communication, two of the three notions described in the new *Course of Study for Junior High Schools*, (i.e., proactive and interactional) are already widely practiced. The term “communication” was first used in the *Course of Study for Junior High Schools* in 1989, and it was expressed as “communication abilities” in the 2008 *Course of Study for Junior High Schools*. This indicates how English language classrooms in Japan have gradually become more communication-oriented.

Then, what is necessary for the learning to be “deeper?” In this example from a junior high school textbook of how to introduce the comparative and superlative, it uses the following sentences:

France is larger than Japan.

The Nile River is the longest river in the world.

Do you know the highest mountain in Japan? Yes. It’s Mt. Fuji.

(*Sunshine English Course 2*, 2018, p. 80, 82)

They are good samples for introducing the target forms, and use plain facts to help students understand the meaning of the sentences before the explanation of the grammatical structure. However, it is doubtful that the junior-high school level learners are satisfied with only the simple facts stated in these sentences. What is missing here are reasons: why do we need to compare the size of France and Japan, why do we need to mention the longest river in the world, and why do we need to say what the highest mountain in Japan is? These examples are so well-known that these alone may not arouse the highly motivated learners’ interest in stating them. If we are to compare the population, population densities, industrial products, agricultural products, and

so on, then a comparison of the size of the countries becomes important, and this surely induces “deeper” learning. Although many of us do know the longest river and the highest mountain in Japan, most of the people living in Mie do not know the longest river in Mie (the Miyagawa River) or the highest mountain in Mie (Odaigahara, not Gozaisho). In the same way, many of us know that Hokkaido is larger than Kyushu, which is larger than Shikoku, but almost no one knows how many times larger they are. In fact, roughly speaking, Honshu is about three times larger than Hokkaido, which is about twice as large as Kyushu, which is about twice the size of Shikoku. (The word “twice” appears in *Sunshine English Course 3*). Using these kinds of “general-knowledge” statements along with their significance, to pique students’ interest, is a way of implementing deeper learning.

A Note on Terminology

This essay is mainly based on the author’s lecture titled “Communication Activities Focusing on ‘Proactive, Interactive, and Deeper Learning’” given in Japanese at the Annual Conference of the Mie Prefectural Junior High School English Education Association (San Ei Ken) on January 15, 2018, co-sponsored by the Mie Prefectural Board of Education, held at Toba Higashi Junior High School. The main purpose of the lecture was to present the author’s view on what should be prepared before the revised *Course of Study for Junior High Schools* comes into effect in 2021.

The title of the lecture was originally in Japanese. Since no fixed English expressions had been officially proposed, “proactive” was used for the Japanese word *shutaiteki*, “interactive” for *taiwateki*, and “deeper” for *fukai*. According to *Kenkyusha’s New Japanese-English Dictionary*, the word *shutaiteki* is translated as “independent; responsive; active.” It is also possible to use such words as “autonomous” or “voluntary.” These, however, do not seem to

satisfactorily convey the notion implied in the revised 2017 *Course of Study for Junior High Schools*. In contrast, the term “proactive,” which means, according to *the Oxford Dictionary of English (ODE)*, “creating or controlling a situation rather than just responding to it after it has happened,” more closely matches the context of the language classroom. One antonym for “proactive,” for example, is “reactive,” which means “showing a response to a stimulus” (*ODE*), and that carries a rather passive connotation, with the more positive image of *shutaiteki* being just the opposite of “reactive.” Unless otherwise stated, all of the translations are the author’s, in some cases with reference to phrasing used in earlier versions of Education Ministry materials.

In the new 2017 *Course of Study for Junior High Schools*, the speaking skill is divided into two areas: interaction and presentation. In both areas, learners are required to exchange information “improvisationally” and the improvisational exchange of information requires them to do far more than just repeat formulaic expressions. According to the Education Ministry’s *Commentary on the Course of Study for Junior High Schools (Chūgakkō gakushūshidōryō kaisetsu)* (2017, p.21), students are expected to interact without taking time to memorize and recite prepared speech scripts. This type of activity can be said to go far beyond the notion of “independent; responsive; active” to enter the realm of “proactive.”

The term “junior/senior high school” is used here instead of “lower/upper secondary school,” even though the latter is often used in the English translation of the Education Ministry documents. This is simply because the former is more widely used in other contexts. Also, the author uses “deeper” for *fukai*. Although the direct translation of it is “deep,” such a gloss it gives the impression that there is an absolute depth. In the context of education, speaking about absolute depth of learning is inappropriate. Rather, practicing teachers endeavor every day to improve their classes so that their students’ learning becomes deeper and deeper.

1. Revised 2017 *Courses of Study*

Nine years after the publication of the 2008 *Course of Study for Elementary Schools* and *Course of Study Junior High Schools (Course of Study)*, the newly revised ones for elementary and junior high schools were released in 2017. Many reforms to the curriculum contents are proposed across different school levels. One of the greatest changes is that English is to be taught to younger children than in the previous *Courses of Study*. Going hand in hand with this, grammatical forms and sentence patterns to be taught at elementary schools are now specified. Furthermore, some of the linguistic materials that were previously first taught at senior high school are now to be introduced in junior high schools. Let us take a brief overview of the contents of the 2017 *Courses of Study*.

1-1 English Activities for the the Third and Fourth Grades of Elementary Schools

Although formally named “Foreign Language Activities,” for the sake of convenience, we can understand it to mean “English Activities,” because the *Course of Study for Elementary Schools* also states that “English should be selected.” According to the 2017 *Course of Study for Elementary Schools*, the objective of English Activities is “to develop the foundation (*soji*) of the disposition and the ability to communicate,” which, although not thoroughly identical, is similar to the goal of the English Activities for the fifth and sixth grades in the 2008 *Course of Study for Elementary Schools*, in that the word foundation (*soji*) is used. In English Activities, the following three areas are to be taught: listening, speaking (interaction), and speaking (presentation). As was the case of the previous 2008 *Course of Study for Elementary School*, grammatical forms and sentence patterns are not specified.

1-2 English for the Fifth and Sixth Grades of Elementary Schools

In the previous section, we saw that the objective of the former fifth and sixth grades is similar to that of the new third and fourth grades of elementary school English education, but English as a subject will also be introduced for the first time into elementary school education. English Activities were not treated as an independent subject before, but as an area of study (*ryoiki*) in the 2008 *Course of Study for Elementary School*. According to the 2017 *Course of Study for Elementary School*, though, the objective of English going forward is to develop the basis (*kiso*) of the disposition and the ability to communicate—similar to the goal of English for the junior high school students in the 2008 *Course of Study for Junior High Schools*, which sought to develop students' basic (*kiso*) communication abilities. Thus, in the sense that both use the term *kiso*, we have a general impression that the former objective for junior high school English education has now become the current one for the fifth and sixth grades of elementary school English education.

Since English has become a subject, and is no longer an area of study, vocabulary and grammatical items to be dealt with are specified as follows:

600 to 700 words, idioms and common usages

Auxiliary verbs (can, do)

Interrogatives (how, what, when, where, who, why)

Gerunds

Past tense forms (regular and irregular)

The “to” infinitive (not listed as a grammatical item, but dealt with in common usage as in “I want to …”)

Sentence patterns: SV, SVC, SVO

Uppercase fonts and lowercase fonts of the alphabets for both reading and writing

Basic expressions for both reading and writing

Five skill areas: listening, reading, speaking as interaction, speaking as presentation, and writing

All of them are passed down to the 2017 *Course of Study for Elementary Schools* from the junior high school curriculum specified in the previous 2008 *Course of Study for Junior High Schools*.

What may be most surprising to the junior high school English teachers is the introduction of the irregular and regular past-tense forms together. In the elementary-school textbook published by the Ministry of Education, the following sentences appear in one section:

My Summer Vacation

I went to the sea.

I enjoyed swimming.

I ate fresh fish.

It was fun.

(*We can! 2*, 2018, p. 39)

In junior high school English textbooks, the irregular past has usually been introduced after the regular past. One reason for this is that the junior high school textbooks are edited according to grammatical items, even though each program/lesson has its own communicative aims. Given that, dealing with regular past first is reasonable. The learners begin with the regular rules and then follow that by learning exceptions. In reality, however, most of the verbs for daily activities are irregular. Even though the students want to exchange information on what they *ate, drank, saw, thought, spoke, read, wrote, got, took, forgot, gave to, or made*, they have to wait until they finish the regular past tense section and go on to the irregular past part section for this. This situation results in communication activities in junior high school classroom that are

sometimes rather unnatural.

Why does the irregular past tense form exist in present-day English? The remains of strong verbs from Old English appear to us today as the irregular past, and in Old English some verbs changed vowels to indicate the temporal shift (gradation, or vowel shift). In the long history of English, many of the strong, or irregular, verbs have become weak, or regular, verbs (ending with *-ed*), whereas some remained unchanged (*Sanseido's New Dictionary of English Grammar*, 1992, has a clear explanation of this phenomenon). Because they lack a pattern, the mastery of irregular verbs is difficult. In junior high, learners have had no other way of learning them besides memorizing as many as 60 verbs one by one.

However, irregular verbs have one advantage over regular verbs. Even though regular past tense forms are easy to understand because of the regularities of the derivational suffix, it is sometimes difficult to recognize the pronunciation of the *-ed* parts since they are pronounced very weakly. For example, it can be difficult for beginners to distinguish whether a speaker says, "I cook dinner" or "I cooked dinner" when the phrases are spoken naturally, because the past tense verb ends with a barely audible [t] sound. On the contrary, it is a simple matter to distinguish between "I eat dinner" or "I ate dinner." Although the goal by senior high school graduation is English without formulaic expressions, in elementary schools, grammatical rules of the past tense formation will not be the focus of lessons. So, no grammatical analysis is expected, and a limited number of regular and irregular verbs are just presented as they are to be used in communication activities as formulaic expressions. In the above example, learners fill in the final part of each sentence with nouns indicating location, verbs in gerund-form expressing action, and the names of foods they ate. In cases where grammatical rules of the regular past tense formation are not taught, irregular verbs may be presented simultaneously with the regular verbs.

1-3 English for Junior High Schools

Now let us summarize the new features of the 2017 *Course of Study for Junior High Schools*. The objective of English is to develop the disposition and the ability to communicate, and the term “*kiso*,” which appears in the 2017 *Course of Study for Elementary Schools*, is deleted for the junior high school level. This implies that something more than the “basis” (*kiso*) is now required at junior high schools. This change is embodied in the following description from the *Course of Study for Junior High Schools*:

1. 1600 to 1800 vocabulary words are to be taught
2. The speaking skill is divided into two areas: interaction and presentation
3. One goal is to try to actualize the learners’ proactive, interactional, and deeper learning
4. One goal is to make English classes a place where actual communication takes place, and so lessons are to be taught in English as a general rule

In the former 2008 *Course of Study for Junior High Schools*, the total number of words were just 1200. Compared to this, 1600 to 1800 words are a significant increase. Together with the 600 to 700 words learned at elementary schools, learners in Japan are to be taught 2200 to 2500 words by the time they graduate from junior high schools. “English is to be taught in English” may arouse controversy in junior high school education. The former 2009 *Course of Study for Senior High Schools*, which was published one year after the junior high school version, first stated that English was to be taught in English. So we can say that the concept of monolingual English education (i.e., using only English in the classroom), rather than that of bilingual English education (i.e., using English and the learners’ native language in the classroom), is being transferred down from senior high school English education to junior high school English education. As we have seen, one more thing which passed down

from senior high school English education to junior high school English education is the loss of the word “*kiso*” in the opening statement of the English section of the 2017 *Course of Study for Junior High Schools*.

This raises a question as to whether all the lessons should be taught in English, and if not, what should the balance be? It may be unrealistic to teach every aspect of English in English. In junior high school English education, contrary to elementary school English education, explicit grammatical analysis is expected, because not only formulaic expressions, but also rule-based expressions are necessary. While it may be possible to acquire simple formulaic patterns naturally by practicing in communicative settings, it is not easy to learn complex grammatical items such as relative pronouns in a natural manner. Although not impossible, it would take a long time and require a large amount of natural input. Therefore, instead of expecting natural acquisition of the complex grammatical items, teaching the rules of them metalinguistically is far more efficient and time saving, though there are pros and cons to teaching grammar rules separately. Compared to the elementary school students, junior high school students are cognitively mature enough to understand the grammar rules.

What is meant by “English is be taught in English” is probably that we ought to give the students as many opportunities as possible to interact in English in the classrooms. According to one survey on junior high school English education by the Mie Prefectural Board of Education, 46.4% of students’ activities were done in English in 2013, but increased up to 64.6% in 2016. In proportion to this, the teachers’ use of English in class increased from 25.8% to 45.3% in the same period (*the Mie Prefectural English Education Reformation Plan (Mieken Eigokyoiku kaizen puran)*, 2017).

In addition to the above-mentioned conceptual reformation, the following grammatical items from the 2009 *Course of Study for Senior High Schools* are to be taught at an earlier point:

1. Exclamatory sentence
2. S – V – Indirect Object – that/what clause
3. S – be verb – adjective – that clause
4. Present perfect progressive
5. Subjunctive past

Among them, the second, fourth, and fifth ones are challenging both to the teachers and their students. (The first one, although it appears in the junior high school textbooks, was not formally listed as a structure to be taught in the 2008 *Course of Study for Junior High Schools*.) According to the *Commentary on the Course of Study for Junior High Schools* (2017, p. 40), a sentence like “My brother told me that he would come to the party” is to be included in the teaching. There are several possibilities, but it could be seen as indirect (reported) speech of “My brother said to me, ‘I will go to the party.’” To paraphrase the direct speech into the indirect speech requires manipulation of verb tenses, pronouns, and the shifting of viewpoints.

To master the usage of present perfect progressive, learners have to understand whether the meaning expressed in the sentence is the duration of the situation or the continuous action. An example of the former is “I have studied English for ten years,” and one of the latter is “I have been studying English for three hours.” The former means that ten years have passed since the person started to study English, whereas the latter means that the person has been studying English for three hours without interruption. Although difficult, it is not so challenging compared to the subjunctive past.

What makes learning the subjunctive past so difficult is the combination of two abstract concepts. One is the use of the past tense when referring to the present. The other is the notion of supposition. Supposition in this case means imagination, wishes, or possibilities. In English, contrary to Japanese, a special

pattern is used to express the supposition that is contrary to the facts. In Japanese, “Moshi ashita haretara…” (literally, if it is fine tomorrow)” and “Moshi ima harete itara…” (literally, if it is fine now)” have a similar structure with a slight change in meaning, whereas in English, “If it is fine tomorrow…” and “If it were fine now…” are used to express the respective meanings. Even though the two look similar, the meaning is quite different; the latter implies that it is raining now but supposes a situation in which it is actually fine. Learners must, therefore, be able to identify whether what they want to express is contrary to reality or not.

When a simple condition of the future event is stated, a sentence like “If it is fine tomorrow…” is used. Whereas, if that event is very unlikely to occur (in this case, for example, a typhoon is sure to hit this area), a sentence like “If it were to be fine tomorrow…” is used. Subjunctive future will, of course, not be taught at the junior high school level, as the very concept of supposition is difficult to recognize. One more example is the following pair:

If I have a car, I can give you a ride to the station.

If I had a car, I could give you a ride to the station.

As is mentioned in the *Commentary on the Course of Study for Junior High Schools* (p. 49) in the case of the first sentence, the person actually owns a car, but it is temporarily unavailable, whereas in the second sentence, the person does not own a car, and is expressing his or her desire for one.

The subjunctive mood is challenging, but if the learners were able to use it, they could surely enjoy richer and more poetic sentences such as “If I were a bird, I could fly to you” (once used in a TV commercial) or “I wish I could talk to my cat.” Also, the following journal writing would become possible after finishing junior high school courses: “I’m in Tokyo now. It has been raining since yesterday, but I’m very glad that it is fine today. My cousin told me that

Shibuya was a fun place. If I lived near Tokyo, I could go to Shibuya every Sunday!” Of course, all the structures except the first one belonged to the senior high school curriculum before the implementation of the 2017 course of study.

2. Changes in Learning Styles

Junior high school English education will include three important reforms when the new course of study is implemented, as was discussed in the previous section. The first one is the addition of larger vocabulary and new grammatical structures. The second is the primary language to be used in the classroom. Although mono-lingual education would be unrealistic when dealing with grammatical explanations, other classroom activities are to be done primarily in English. The third one is about the classroom activities themselves, which are supposed to try and actualize the students’ proactive, interactive, and deeper learning. In the *Summary of the Discussion for the Next Courses of Study (Jiki gakushūshidōyōryō tō ni kansuru koremade no shingi no matome)* by the Ministry of Education in August, 2016, the term “active learning” was often used. But when the concept of active learning was stipulated in the new courses of study, it was interpreted as comprising three types of learning. This third point of the reformation is the largest change among the three because the actualization of it requires refinement of classroom teaching.

Ever since the term “communication” first appeared in the *Course of Study for Junior High Schools* in 1989, communication activities have gradually been introduced in the classroom. This contrasts with the decades before that, when mechanical pattern practices and grammar-translation were the main content of English study (this is evident from the authorized textbooks in the 1950s such as *Revised Jack and Betty*.)

To make classroom activities communicative, an information gap between one student and another is one of the essential points (for details, see the

Taishūkan Eigo kyōiku yōgo jiten, or A Guide to English Language Teaching Terminology, revised Edition, 2009 (p. 57)). For example, when student A and student B share a whole picture of a zoo depicting a lot of different kinds and number of animals and one asks the other “How many elephants are there in the zoo?,” this is not communicative. This does not involve the exchange of unknown information. Therefore, this is only an activity for the consolidation of a grammatical structure. But if student A has a picture of the western half of the zoo and student B the eastern half, then the information gap arises and the same question “How many elephants are there in the zoo?” becomes communicative. This kind of exchange of new information in classroom activities can be said to be an important condition of communication activity. This said, the activity mentioned above, in which all the information about the elephants is shared, though not being communicative, is still necessary so as to familiarize learners with the new structure as a preliminary to communication activities. Mechanical pattern practice, dictation, and interactions using information already known are some of the typical traditional classroom activities, and they have an important position in the second P of the PPP (Presentation-Practice-Production) procedures.

PPP is a conventional classroom procedure focusing mainly on the mastery of grammatical forms. First, new materials are presented to the class. Then, students practice them in the form of grammatical drills including mechanical pattern practice. Since the main purpose of this phase is to familiarize the students with the new grammatical forms, the activities do not necessarily need to be communicatively conditioned. Finally comes the production phase. Here, students use the target forms communicatively.

What becomes an issue is whether simple communication activities like the above-mentioned information gap induce deeper learning. Simply having an information gap bridged in an interaction like “What TV program did you watch yesterday?” “I watched *Segodon* last night” is definitely communicative.

However, this kind of conventional communication activity is rather superficial, and it is doubtful whether this kind of interaction leads to deeper learning. If that is the case, then, what is required is for activities go beyond communication and finally go deeper? We will see some attempts to answer this question in the following sections.

3. Communication Activities that Induce Deeper Learning

In the previous section, we discussed the possibility that conventional communication activities may not always induce deeper learning on their own. One method of making improvements is to relate the five main aspects of communication (i.e., listening, speaking as interaction, speaking as presentation, reading, and writing) to one another; something that is mentioned in the *Commentary on the Course of Study for Junior High Schools* (p. 80).

One widespread method of producing conventional communication is the following activity format: 1) student A asks student B a question using the target form; 2) student B answers student A; 3) they take turns asking one another the same questions, and; 4) they find other partners. As was discussed in the previous section, this flow of interaction is communicative because new information is exchanged. Unfortunately, it might be considered superficial, because the purpose of this activity is not specified and the interaction involves only one aspect of communication; namely, speaking as interaction.

What is necessary to make communicative interaction more realistic, or deeper, is to posit a purpose. In the above example of a conventional activity, asking questions itself seems to have become the purpose and no further expansion is intended. Take the example of the interaction shown in the previous section again. The interaction “What TV program did you watch yesterday?” as a question, and “I watched *Segodon* last night” as an answer is rather superficial and unnatural. However, this same interaction becomes more

realistic when the purpose of this interview is “a survey to find the top-rated TV program in this class.” In this case, students ask questions with a purpose and they can also make a presentation later about their own survey, which leads to the involvement of another area (in this case, speaking as presentation). Assigning each student slightly different purposes makes the activity even more realistic. For example, each student is assigned one day of the week, and they ask about the viewing habits of their classmates for it. After gathering information through interviewing one another, each student can reach their own conclusions in the following pattern: “XX percent of the students in this class watched *Segodon* last Sunday. Among them, YY percent of them liked it, but ZZ percent of them didn’t like it.”

After the presentation, students may summarize the survey in a written form, and when this written matter is read by other students, it introduces a reading element; thus, all of the five aspects are linked in coordination with one another and deeper learning may be promoted.

To summarize the discussion above, the following five conditions seem to be necessary to make an activity deeper:

1. The activity has a realistic purpose. (TV program rating.)
2. An exchange of new/unknown information is involved. (sample question: What TV program did you watch yesterday?)
3. Information gathered is analyzed. (XX percent of the students in this class watched YY.)
4. A conclusion of the analysis is presented. (According to my survey, XX percent of the students in this class watched YY.)
5. Two or more of the five communicative areas are linked in coordination with one other. (Please take notes on my presentation.)

The first and second ones are the minimum conditions for an activity to be

communicative, while the third, fourth, and fifth become necessary to make the learning deeper. (Some of them are considered to be the requirement of a task. (Ellis, 2015, p. 272))

Let us discuss one more example of linking more than two areas. This was included in my comments given after the classroom research presentation by a junior high school teacher at the 41st Annual Convention of the Tōkai-Hokuriku Public Junior High School English Education Association (Tōkai Hokuriku Kōritsu Chūgakkō Eigo Kyōiku Kenkyūkai) held on August 9, 2017 in Yokkaichi. The theme of the session was “fostering four skills focusing on speaking and writing.” The classroom activity presented was mainly an interview with more than one skills involved. The video clip shown then depicted the students’ active participation in the interaction. My suggestion was about how to link all the five areas in coordination. Using three students, the procedure is as follows: First, Student 1 writes a memo about what to speak about to Student 2; then Student 1 speaks to Student 2, who listens to what Student 1 says. After that, Student 2 speaks to Student 3 about what he/she heard, and Student 3 listens to it. In this cycle, Student 1 uses writing and speaking skills (hereafter, W1 and S1), Student 2 uses listening and speaking skills (L2 and S2), and Student 3 uses listening skill (L3). The information flows through three students like this:

Student 1 [W1 + S1] → Student 2 [L2 + S2] → Student 3 [L3]

In this flow of interaction, three students are participating, and four skills are involved. Looking closely, we see that S1 is an “interaction” and S2 is a “presentation.” Thus, four of the five areas are involved in this flow. What is more important is that in the arrow from Student 1 to Student 2, a negotiation of meaning occurs, if necessary. Negotiation of meaning is the response of the speaker and the listener in order to clarify meaning when mutual understanding

becomes difficult. This includes interactional modifications such as clarification requests, confirmation checks, comprehension checks and so on, which is said to facilitate language acquisition (see *Taishūkan Eigo kyōiku yōgo jiten* 2009, p.152).

Student 2 can write down what they heard from Student 1. In this case, L2 becomes W2, which is to be read by Student 3 (R3) as is shown in the following flow involving four skills.

Student 1 [W1 + S1] → Student B [L2 + W2] → Student 3 [R3]

Of course, Student 1 will play the role of Student 2 and Student 3 in the second or the third turns, and this finally leads to the use of most of the areas by each student.

4. Use Conventional Classroom Procedures to Make the Learning “Deeper”

What is required upon the implementation of the new course of study is to make the activity as “proactive, interactive, and deeper” as possible. This was discussed in detail in the previous section. Again, the minimum condition for an activity to be communicative is whether new or unknown information is exchanged. Using PPP, a typical class proceeds as follows, when the mastery of regular past tense verbs is the aim:

Presentation of some sentences including ones with the regular past tense from the teacher (T) to the students (S):

T: (with a picture) Yesterday, I visited Kyoto and enjoyed the autumn leaves. It was fun.

Practice of the regular past tense forms in the form of mechanical drill.

T: Sapporo, snow.

S: I visited Sapporo and enjoyed the snow.

T: Singapore, local foods.

S: I visited Singapore and enjoyed the local foods.

This type of pattern practice is based on a psychological theory of habit formation, which was used as the main part of the beginning level English classes in the 1950s in Japan. One major criticism against this method is that the students do not speak about their real intentions, which makes this activity rather uninteresting. An alternative activity to avoid being too mechanical is the use of shared information.

Practice eliciting sentences containing the regular past tense forms.

T: I will show you a large picture of a school. In the picture, you can see some students enjoying sports in the school yard and others enjoying activities indoors. Please tell me what they did yesterday.

S1: Atsuko played badminton in the gym.

S2: Rena studied English in the library.

S3: Taishi played baseball in the school ground.

This also does not involve the exchange of new or unknown information, because all the students are looking at the same picture. They are just confirming the shared information. Even though this is not communicative, it certainly acts as an important preliminary to the next phase, where students engage in a communication activity with each other exchanging information about what they actually did.

Production of the sentences expressing what they did, using regular past tense verbs:

S1: I visited () and enjoyed (). It was (). How about you?

S2: I visited () and enjoyed (). It was ().

In the suggested lesson above, there is some question about whether it satisfies the vision in the new course of study. Specifically, does it induce “deeper” learning? Perhaps not. Now let us consider some techniques that may induce deeper learning. Since we have already discussed the ways of deepening communication activities in the production phase in the third section, we will see the deepening of introduction in the presentation phase and of the activities using textbook materials.

4-1 Introduction of New Materials that Leads to Deeper Learning

A new grammatical structure is introduced at the beginning of each class, preferably in English. This is a good opportunity for students to challenge and guess the meaning and the usage of the structure. Let us take a look at the introduction of passive voice with the agent. Passive voice without the agent (e.g., English is spoken in Singapore) has been taught in the previous class. The following sample is based on a teaching plan written by one of the author’s students for a mock teaching assigned in the Method of Teaching English as a Foreign Language II. This is a role-playing class in which each student plays a role of a teacher after preparing a teaching plan and necessary materials. The original introduction was as follows:

T: (showing a picture of Tsu Castle) Look at this picture. What’s this?

S1: Tsu Castle.

T: Correct. (showing a picture of Todo Takatora) Then who is he?

S2: Todo Takatora.

T: Correct. Tsu Castle was built by Todo Takatora.

To be historically precise, he did the repair and extension work in 1611 (Tsu City Tourism Association), but many people in Tsu believe that he built the castle.

The purpose of this type of oral introduction of a new structure is not only to let the students listen to a sample sentence but also to give them a chance to guess what it means. In the above example, although students do have a chance to hear a new pattern with picture cues, it might be insufficient for them to infer the meaning. One way to make the guessing easier is to incorporate a familiar pattern into it. In the previous lesson, the passive voice without the agent was introduced. Therefore, if a passive sentence without the agent is shown first, it will be of great help for students to guess the meaning of the one with the agent. The revised passage is as follows:

T: (showing a picture of Tsu Castle) Look at this picture. What’s this?

S1: Tsu Castle.

T: That’s correct. Tsu Castle is also called Anotsu Castle. Tsu Castle was built in 1611. Then, who built it?

S2: Todo Takatora.

T: Right. Todo Takatora built Tsu Castle. Tsu Castle was built by Todo Takatora.

(showing a picture of Igauenno Castle) He also built Igauenno Castle. Igauenno Castle was also built by Todo Takatora.

The two underlined sentences are a review of the last lesson, and the structure is similar to the new one to be introduced in this lesson. Thus, incorporating a familiar sentence facilitates the recognition of a new pattern, and some students can guess the meaning in some degree before the teacher’s explicit explanation of the passive voice, which will be given later. This type of introduction may lead to proactive and deeper learning.

4-2 Deeper Reading Using Textbook Materials

In November 2016, the author had a chance to talk about the linkage of

elementary and junior high school English education to teachers in Matsusaka, in an event sponsored by the Matsusaka City Education Association (Matsusaka Kyoiku Kenkyukai). The author asked the coordinator to collect questions about English education in advance. Here are some questions about the use of textbook materials (originally in Japanese, my translation).

Is there a better way to teach the textbook materials?

How are the conversational style texts treated?

How are the contents of the textbook taught?

How long is the time allocated to the explanation of the textbook materials?

To answer these questions, the author first proposed the use of various kinds of questions about the textbook materials. In junior high school English classes, the following styles of questions are used: polar questions (i.e., yes-no questions), alternative questions (i.e., questions using “or”), and wh-questions (i.e., questions using interrogatives). Each of the question types is be divided into either display questions or referential questions. A display question is “a question to which the asker knows the answer.” (Lightbown and Spada, 2013, p. 217) On the contrary, a referential question is “a question to which the asker does not know the answer in advance” (Lightbown and Spada, 2013, p. 218), which is also called a “genuine question.” When a teacher asks questions about the textbook passages, display questions are mainly used in educational settings, especially in the examinations where the ease and validity of marking is emphasized. Display questions are appropriate when they are asked to check the comprehension of the passages. Traditionally in Japan, translation was often used to check how accurately the students understood the texts. When the translation is the main part of the English class, it is often criticized for being a Japanese class, not an English class. We should not be too quick to negate the use of translation for comprehension check, as long as it is used as phrase by

phrase, not sentence by sentence, interpretation. Phrase by phrase interpretation means to divide a sentence into sense groups, which may lead to understanding English through English without the intervention of Japanese.

The use of display questions, instead of translation, to check the comprehension is particularly preferable because it prompts target language use. Then, what is necessary to make this activity “deeper”? As we have seen, the use of display questions in English is a classroom activity. Note that it is not a “communication” activity, because all the students in class, including the teacher (s), share the same textbook and are supposed to know the one and only correct answer. This is equivalent to a classroom activity where all the students share the same information (e.g., a large picture of the school) and no information gaps exist.

To make the comprehension check communicative and “deeper,” referential questions are useful. The following is an extract from a junior high school textbook.

Alex: Excuse me. I want two lemons, three peaches, and two packs of cherries, please.

Clerk: Is that all?

A: Yes.

C: OK. Nine hundred and eighty yen, please.

A: Here you are.

C: Thank you very much. Here’s your change. Twenty yen.

(New Horizon English Course 1, 2015, p. 46)

Questions like “Does Alex buy some apples?,” “What does Alex buy?,” or “How much does Alex pay” are display questions. Questions like “How much is a lemon (a peach, a pack of cherries)?” and “What is Alex going to make?” are referential questions. “Does Alex give the clerk a 1,000-yen note?” is also

referential, even with an illustration of Alex opening a wallet. (All these questions can be explained in Japanese later because the first-year students have not learned the English structures used in the questions.)

Another way to make a comprehension activity deeper is the summarization of the conversation in the form of a fill-in-the-blanks type passage: [] buys three [] and two [] and two packs of []. He pays [] yen and receives [] yen as the change. (This may also be explained in Japanese if necessary.)

The following two passages give us some insights into what deeper reading looks like. These were also introduced in Toyozumi (2014) as appropriate samples that might make students go far beyond the superficial understanding of cultural phenomena. The first one is a conversation between Emily and Ken, a Japanese, who are visiting an old religious building.

Emily: Look at that building. Is it a temple?

Ken: No, it isn't. It's a shrine.

E: What's the difference?

K: Er...

(*Sunshine English Course 1*, 1992, p. 25)

After reading this, students can challenge referential questions like “Why can Ken answer that this is a shrine?” and “If you were Ken, what would your answer be to the last question?” (Again, these questions need to be explained in Japanese). Ken answered that it was a shrine because of the illustration of a torii-gate on the same page. Although in Japan the word “temple” is used mainly for Buddhist structures and “shrine” for Shinto ones, no such distinction can be seen in the *Oxford Dictionary of English*. Inquiry into that level may induce deeper leaning.

One more example is a comment by an American senior high school student.

I lived in Japan for three years. I went to school by train. I noticed two interesting things.

People often slept on the trains. We usually don’t do that in the States. (subsequent conversation omitted.)

(*Sunshine English Course 1*, 1992, p. 77)

Here, a referential question is “Why don’t people in the States sleep on the trains?” To answer this question, students must consider the level of safety in Japan which we do not generally notice, though it is gradually becoming a myth lately.

Conclusion

We discussed what the new *Course of Study for Junior High Schools* requires junior high school teachers to do upon its implementation. Though there are several well-known discrete points of reform such as teaching English in English, teaching of the subjunctive mood in junior high school, the introduction of reading and writing in elementary schools, and so forth, one of the main features of the revision from the viewpoint of the overall English education program is the introduction of English as a subject for the fifth and sixth grades of elementary school. In the previous *Course of Study for Elementary Schools*, elementary school English was not treated as a “subject” but as “activities” with the objective of “forming the foundation of communication abilities while familiarizing pupils with sounds and basic expressions.” This meant that there was a clear distinction between elementary school English education and junior high school English education, in that the former focuses mainly on meaning and fluency, whereas the latter gradually adds its focus on form and accuracy.

The junior high students-to-be could recognize the difference and prepare mentally for it. Those who did not prepare enough felt the so-called “junior high

school first year gap (*chūichi gyappu*.)” After the introduction of English as a subject including reading and writing, there is a fear that this gap will not be eliminated, but rather appears earlier at the elementary school level. To avoid this, a smooth transition from “activities” to “subject” is necessary. Although teaching materials, including electronic versions, are well-prepared, teacher training is still in need of work.

What is expected for junior high school English education? Remedial sessions at the beginning may be necessary for those who are not ready for junior high school English education. For those who have mastered the requirements of the elementary school English education, “deeper” learning at any phase of the class might be required to meet students’ expectations, which will increase their motivation as they advance to higher educational levels.

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