

INTERNATIONALIZATION AT  
TAKEFU HIGASHI HIGH SCHOOL

Gerald K. LeTendre

*Abstract*

This article details innovations in the English curriculum at a rural high school in central Honshu. The report discusses the role of the native speaker Assistant English Teacher (AET), texts written by the school, and the use of extracurricular activities in strengthening students' use of English. In *Communication Practice*, students practice a range of communicative skills starting with basic skills like good eye contact, and eventually begin debating in the second year. The program has been successful in developing the speaking and writing abilities of the students in the target language. While some students have difficulty keeping up with the pace of the program, most are able to carry on conversations with native speakers of English, and can discuss complex problems.

1. Introduction

*Internationalization*—this fairly ungainly word has swept across Japan escaping from the realm of diplomats to invade factories, ward offices, colleges, and the nation's schools. What the word means is hard to say since everyone uses it to suit their purpose. Despite such confusion, great numbers of educators are deeply concerned with how to internationalize Japan's future generations.

This article will detail what has been a very successful encounter between *internationalization* and the world of education. In Fukui prefecture, an *International Course* has been opened at one of the local high schools, and at least in regard to the students' use of English, the program has succeeded in allowing them to communicate and to be at ease in multicultural settings.

Gerald LeTendre graduated in 1983 from Harvard with a B.A. in sociology. He has taught in South India and in California. He was involved with educational research at the Huron Institute and the Research Institute for Educational Problems. He came to Japan on the *Mombusho English Fellow* scheme in 1986. Since then he has taught in Fukui public schools.

The school, Takefu Higashi High School, is a public, academic school located in a rural area about five kilometers from a town of 70,000. Students entering the school are usually 15 years old, and have had three years of English in junior high school. Takefu Higashi was opened in 1987, and will reach its full capacity in April, 1989. Thus, only the first and second year curricula have been implemented so far. As this is a quite rural part of Japan, the school would, at first, seem rather isolated from the world. However, it has developed a program which brings in visitors from around the world and has established "sister-school" relations with a high school in British Columbia and another in New Jersey.

## 2. Goals

The international course of study is designed to introduce students to a wide range of peoples and cultures through English. As stated in the school handbook, the goal of the school is to "educate future leaders for an international age." This has been interpreted by the curriculum development section as a mandate to produce students who can act as cross-cultural mediators between Japan and the rest of the world. The staff aims to help students not only understand the nature of the world's more pressing problems, but the role Japan can play in the world. Within this broad range of goals, the most important task has been to develop students' communicative abilities to the point where they can communicate fluently in English. An additional goal is to develop their analytical skills, so students are challenged to think out complicated issues by themselves and offer their own opinions.

While substantial changes have been made in the curriculum for all departments, the greatest innovations are to be found in the English department. The staff is trying to develop a curriculum which promotes students' creative talents and the development of individual judgment. This article will confine itself to the concrete changes made in the curriculum and the effect they have had.

## 3. Assistant English Teachers

The Ministries of Education, Foreign Affairs, and Home Affairs are currently supporting a program which hires native speakers of English to work in Japan's high schools and junior high schools. Known as the Japan Exchange and Teaching (JET) program, it recruited over 1,400 participants from the U.S.A., New Zealand, Canada, Australia, and the U.K. in 1988.

The influx of so many foreign teachers in Japanese high schools has drastically changed the status quo of English education. Professional language educators and associations such as JALT and the Federation of English Education Societies have given considerable attention to the program in the last year (Takasuka, 1988; Nozawa, 1988).

As the JET program's minimum requirement is a college B.A., some Assistant English Teachers (AETs) have little or no knowledge of teaching English while some are professional ESL/EFL instructors. Many AETs have had a great deal of difficulty adapting to the rigid Japanese education system and the stilted English used in many texts. Moreover, the Ministry of Education considers those working for the program to be *assistants*, and not competent to teach classes or give grades without assistance. (For a more detailed description of the problems of this situation, see Shiozawa & Rives, 1988.) In large prefectures, AETs are relegated to the status of an English-speaking guest and spend their time visiting a host of schools, seeing each class only once, confining themselves to simple games and introductions.

Fukui prefecture has made a tremendous alteration in this pattern by basing native speakers in each of its high schools, and in certain junior high schools. This system has ensured that each AET can see students on a regular basis and can evaluate students' English proficiency more accurately. The AET position at Takefu Higashi is full-time, and the AET is required to fulfill most of the duties normally assigned to an assistant or sub-homeroom teacher.

Appendix 1 lists the duties (outside of teaching and gathering teaching materials) associated with the AET position at Takefu Higashi. Presently, the AET does not attend section meetings (e.g., of the Library or Guidance section), nor the meetings for first or second year supervisors (*ichi/ni-nen gaku-nenkai*). In all other respects, the AET is treated as one of the staff of the school.

#### 4. Curriculum

During the first year, the students are divided into courses: the International Course (*kokusai-ka*) with two classes and the Academic Course (*futsu-ka*) with six classes. Each class contains about 41 to 46 students. During the second year, the academic or regular course is split into three components. Those in Humanities I (Bunkei 1) are generally trying for humanities courses in national colleges, those in Science I (Rikei 1) for science courses in national colleges, and those in Humanities II (Bunkei 2) for humanities courses in private colleges. In the third year, classes are

further divided to allow students to specialize in either science or humanities for college entrance tests. Additionally, students who wish to enter the job market directly, or who wish to attend other institutions of higher education—*senshugakko*—take the Liberal Arts course (Kyoyou).

1st Year	Int'l Course	Academic Course			
2nd Year	Int'l Course	Humanities I	Science I	Humanities II	
3rd Year	Int'l Course	Humanities I	Science I	Humanities II	Liberal Arts

Figure 1. Structure of the Curriculum

Recognizing that traditional grammar-translation courses do not develop students' communicative skills, the staff has implemented the following courses. These courses are given in addition to the three hours a week of exam-track English.

First Year	Communication Practice I General English I	1 hour per week 1 hour per week
Second Year	Communication Practice II General English II Composition	1 hour per week 1 hour per week 2 hours per week
Third Year	Communication Practice III World Affairs	1 hour per week 3 hours per week

Figure 2. Additional English Courses

To provide balance in all subject areas, students in the first-year International Course take extra classes (*hoshu*) in Math and Japanese while students in the Academic Course take extra English courses (Communication Practice and English Grammar). In the second and third year, students choose which of the tracks they would like to pursue, and the distribution of classes varies according to the course. That is, students in the Natural Science course will take more Math and Natural Sciences, while those in Humanities will have more class hours in Social Studies or Japanese. Students may elect to take classes in the other courses if they need these credits in order to prepare for their college entrance examinations; however, students may not transfer between the International Course and the Academic Course.

At Takefu Higashi a clear division is made between classes which teach English communication skills and those which teach grammar-translation,

or the examination-oriented English classes. General English I exposes students to English articles and broadcasts from overseas. We try to teach students to summarize quickly the main points of a story and then retell the story in simplified English. In the second year, students are given various writing assignments in Composition, including business letters, a short story, and a final research paper. At the same time they are reading articles (in General English II) which are either models for composition or background materials.

Developing students' writing skills has proved easier than developing their speaking skills. The Composition course weans the students off writing in Japanese and then translating into English. It allows them to create imaginative pieces in which they can use far more complicated structures than in conversation. And, most importantly, students are taught how to arrange their thoughts and arguments according to standard English prose conventions.

Arguably, the most important class in the curriculum is Communication Practice (CP), which is the only course which is compulsory for both the International *and* the Academic Courses. This is usually held in the Language Practice (LP) room—a modified language laboratory structure with movable desks. Most of the students' classes take place in the classroom—a room that is strongly associated with passive, exam-track study in the students' minds. The design and atmosphere of the LP counters such restrictive associations by creating an open, relaxed atmosphere. The room is decorated and is also used for watching videos and listening to music.

By enforcing the communicative aspect of language, we have managed to reduce much of the oversensitivity to grammar mistakes that impairs our students' communicative ability, and of which Krashen and Terrell (1983) say:

Difficulties arise when performers, especially beginners, become over-concerned with correctness in communicative situations, trying to check their output against conscious rules at all times. This ... results in hesitancy and subsequent difficulty in participating in conversation. (p. 19)

In the CP class, incorrect grammar usage will not be corrected if the students' utterance is understandable to a native speaker. Unclear or inaudible answers are not acceptable, and we tell students that such responses are failures, whereas clearly audible but grammatically questionable responses are successes. The teachers tell students that "We like mistakes." We make it a point to laugh at our own errors, and to provide humorous stories and jokes in class. We emphasize the fact that students should try to make each

other laugh through telling funny stories or asking funny questions like “Do you play gateball?” “Have you eaten barbecued cat?” (*yakineko*). These activities greatly relieve the tension in the class, and have helped students change their attitudes toward language use.

## 5. Texts

A significant barrier faced by the program was the lack of appropriate texts. Public schools must use only texts approved by the Ministry of Education. However, the texts we reviewed did not meet the students' needs. The staff members of the school set about writing two texts for the CP class which were based on topics and structure students could readily utilize. These texts were approved by the Fukui Prefectural Board of Education for use at Takefu Higashi.

The first-year text is called *Let Me Introduce Myself* (Ogawa & Uchida, 1987) and the beginning lessons are at a level which would be comfortable for second-year *junior* high school students. Yet it is this simplicity which is the text's strength, for it allows teachers and students to address the multitude of cultural communication barriers that inhibit Japanese students in their attempts to speak English. The exercises are student-centered, instructing the student to introduce his or her family, school, etc. The fourth unit, “Let Me Introduce My Town,” is done in groups with students researching their hometowns and presenting the results to the class in a report which includes audio and visual materials.

The second-year text, *Let's Talk About the World* (Ogawa et al., 1988), is composed of five units each with a different goal: public speaking, small group discussions, role playing, panel discussions, and debate. Each unit contains seven lessons which focus on different world problems such as discrimination, educational problems, and environmental disruption.

While this second text concerns itself with many new and difficult topics, efforts have been made to relate the issues to problems or conditions in Japan. Thus, in Lesson 16, the unit on discrimination, the text does not dwell on racial problems in other lands. Instead, the lesson presents the problems faced by a Korean school teacher in Osaka, and asks the students to discuss the situation in a group setting.

## 6. The First Year

First year CP begins with simple instructions in classroom English. After the first two or three weeks the course is conducted almost entirely in

English. We have dubbed this technique “immersion,” because the student must sit in the English environment just as they sit in a Japanese bath. When students enter the LP room for the first time, they are told that the CP class will be different from any other they have taken. They are asked to pretend that they are now in a Western classroom, and that they can ask questions freely. We explain the goals of the course and the system of grading. This is a required course for the International Course students, and it is quite a shock for students to learn that they will be graded on classroom participation as well as their ability to express their feelings and opinions. The majority of classes that they took in junior high school had been graded on the results of tests and tests alone.

To engage the students in this new way of learning, we begin simply by training students to raise their hand to answer or ask questions, to speak loudly, to face their audience, and to ignore mistakes which do not affect communicative understanding. Such basic attitudes and behaviors may be taken for granted in Western classrooms, but many of our students are so inhibited by the fear of making mistakes—or of appearing foolish in front of their classmates—that they will sit through an entire period without understanding any part of the lesson rather than raise their hand. Girls and boys at this age can be embarrassed about speaking to one another, and it took several weeks before the boys in some classes actually looked at girl students while practicing simple conversation patterns. (For a more detailed description of interaction between the sexes, see Stevenson et al., 1986, Chapters 4 and 12.)

The following is a general outline of the goals for the first year:

#### COMMUNICATION PRACTICE I

##### Objectives:

To enable the students to introduce the following in simple English:

1. themselves
2. their schools
3. their families
4. their towns
5. their country

##### Language Skills:

###### Unit One

1. Speaking in a clear, loud voice.
2. Facing the person one is addressing.
3. Making eye-contact.
4. Practicing dialogs in pairs.
5. Speaking with a member of the opposite sex.
6. Attempting some answer rather than remaining silent.

**Unit Two**

1. To speak standing in front of their classmates.
2. To ask questions of their classmates.
3. Deliver their speeches without using a script.
4. Increased speed in response to questions.
5. Asking questions about structures they do not understand.

**Unit Three**

1. Powers of description are emphasized.
2. Students are encouraged to speak more spontaneously.  
(e.g. Answer questions on the spot about family members.)

**Unit Four**

1. Active use of more complex sentence structures.
2. Students learn to describe, in simple English, terms they cannot translate directly.

**Unit Five**

1. Learn what aspects of Japanese culture are unfamiliar to overseas visitors.

Generally speaking, the early lessons focus on improving the students' ability to speak in front of other students. We then move on to pairwork and try to get students to use natural intonation and rhythm. The major event of the course is the group presentation where students research their own town, write a joint report, and present that report to their fellow students.

Because we use topics that students know intimately, the students are able to concentrate on language production and on developing their communicative skills. They are able to "switch" their verbal and non-verbal orientation in order to use understandable English actively. In the first year of the program, after about five months of classes, the students showed a noticeable change of attitude during the CP class. The "feel" of the class became more relaxed and energetic when they entered the LP room. Students began switching their cultural boundaries as they switched their linguistic boundaries. Their ability to communicate with visitors from other countries, as well as their ability to talk about their surroundings, was greatly enhanced.

## **7. The Second Year**

The second year curriculum is designed to develop specific language skills while learning about the world. The approach is twofold. After one year in the International Course, the students have been exposed to students from many countries. (In the two years since opening, the school has had



well over 100 visitors and exchange students.) They have learned about many different customs and can be expected to have a general knowledge of the world. In the second year they are expected to explain their own culture in detail and discuss major international problems.

## COMMUNICATION PRACTICE II

### Objectives:

To enable students to discuss the following topics in English:

1. language and culture
2. religion and customs
3. discrimination
4. environmental disruption
5. education

Each lesson seeks to develop a special skill:

1. public speaking
2. small group discussion
3. roleplay
4. panel discussion
5. debate

### Outline of Teaching Procedure:

1. Humorous warm-up discussion
2. Pronunciation drill
3. Students read the passage and ask questions
4. Comprehension check
5. Discussion of the topic

The second year CP course develops more complex speaking skills while introducing a variety of topics. Though we are covering a great deal of material, both linguistic and cultural, most students have not become bored because the excitement of being able to discuss such relevant issues has kept them interested. Also, students have a very powerful motivation in being able to talk with a number of non-Japanese people. They have been willing to work hard in mastering difficult material in order to talk with non-Japanese guests. During a recent visit by students from the American School in Japan, the second-year class went over the "Agnes Controversy" (debate surrounding pop star Agnes Chan bringing her baby to work) and discussed the problems of working mothers.

In the second year, we often split our classes in two with each teacher (AET and JET) teaching one section on alternate weeks. Within the CP class, the students are asked to form groups of five or six and pick a group leader. The group leader must present the group's opinions when students discuss the weekly topic. For composition, half the class took typing from the JET

and half the class worked with the AET on their current written assignments on an alternating basis.

## 8. Extracurricular English Activities

Time is precious in a Japanese school and to increase communicative skills without sacrificing test scores, it is necessary to utilize extracurricular time. Constant exposure to native speakers, whether it is an AET, exchange student, or visitor, is needed to keep the newly acquired language skills from deteriorating. To give our students a maximum number of chances to use these skills—as well as to increase their motivation to study English—we have developed a number of programs which utilize “open” spaces in the weekly schedule. Special events are also held throughout the year which provide students with chances to communicate with their peers from other countries. The following activities have become a vital part of the International Course curriculum.

### 8.1 *Guidance Period*

In the past we have gone over new articles, had private interviews, let students read short stories, and held small group discussions. Guidance period must, of course, be used primarily for discussion of school matters; however, nearly three guidance periods a month are free to be used for English in some way.

### 8.2 *Long Homeroom Period*

This time is best used for private interviews, as students have a variety of material to go over. This is a good time to provide weak speakers with a little extra practice.

### 8.3 *Summer Seminar*

Because we invite students from our sister-school to the seminar, a great deal of interest is generated among the students, thus maintaining a high motivation level. The seminar is composed of a number of small group activities where our students, and students and teachers from overseas can interact freely.

### 8.4 *American School in Japan (ASIJ) Visit*

ASIJ and Takefu Higashi have exchanged visits for the past two years. In 1988 a small number of ASIJ students had a one-night homestay with our students. First year students were encouraged to bring in typically Japanese

things such as kimono, kendama, koma, origami, calligraphy, and explain their significance to the ASIJ students during class.

### *8.5 Lunchtime Conversation*

Three days a week, five students gather with the AET for fifty minutes of conversation over lunch. The goal of the conversations is simply to get students over their shyness of speaking English in front of others. When working with a more bashful group, it helps to have an activity such as a song to listen to or a picture to write about.

### *8.6 Guest Lectures*

The Takefu area attracts tourists interested in Japanese paper and pottery. Often we can invite these people to our school to talk about themselves and give students a chance to ask them questions.

### *8.7 Trip to Sister School*

In January 1989, 20 students traveled to New Jersey for a two-week visit to their sister school.

### *8.8 English Speaking Society (ESS)*

Big projects included: a Halloween and a Christmas party; daily listening practices (using NHK broadcasts); letter writing sessions. Currently, the ESS is working on producing the school's English journal.

### *8.9 Telephone Call in English*

In 1987 the Japanese teachers called all the students in the International Course. Each day, one teacher would call three to five students between 9:00 and 10:00 p.m. The purpose was to develop awareness of telephone manners, and to practice the topics they had learned in CP.

### *8.10 Open House for Overseas Visitors*

During July we usually invite overseas students who are visiting the area on summer homestay plans to come and study at our school. The number varies from year to year. The first year we received nearly 20 visitors.

## **9. Evaluation**

Comments from parents, administrators, and other educators have been very positive, with some educators expressing their astonishment that second-year high school students could express themselves so well in

English. Many also noted the enthusiasm for the school, and the confidence students had in their work, particularly when delivering their opinions in a demonstration class given on the school's "open day."

One question which the teaching staff has dealt with for some time, is how to motivate and aid the slower learners in such a fast-paced course. Several of the students in the second-year course have difficulty keeping up with their classmates—partly due to the inordinately large class size, 47. We have tried to help the slower students through more individual attention during extracurricular periods, and by encouraging pairwork in some classes. However, at least five students appear discouraged and have substantial difficulty keeping up with their classmates.

## 10. Conclusion

Many of the changes that have been implemented at Takefu Higashi are ones that could be easily implemented in most senior high schools. Several schools in Fukui prefecture have used similar techniques: such as creating their own texts, encouraging AETs to use extracurricular time, and working with the long homeroom and guidance periods. Fukui prefecture also sponsors a very popular Spring English Seminar for high school students that includes a vigorous debate on matters like school uniforms, dating, etc. There are also local summer seminars for junior high school students where AETs and junior high school teachers work on creative language activities for two or three days.

The process of maintaining good speaking skills is not an easy one. Our students assume a passive role in the exam-track courses where the traditional emphasis on memorization takes precedence. To give students the chance to use their language skills, they need regular periods of time which are less structured than their usual classes as well as activities designed to excite their curiosity and give them a positive feeling about communicating in English. Without such opportunities, it seems that these hard-won skills could rapidly disappear.

## Appendix 1

### Duties of the Assistant English Teacher (AET)

1. Assistant Homeroom Teacher  
Attend the following:
  - a. *Katei-homon* (visit in student's home) Once a year in summer.
  - b. *Sansha-mendan* (parent, teacher, student conferences) Twice: summer and winter
  - c. Short homeroom activities
  - d. Guidance and long homeroom
2. ESS Club Supervisor
3. Supervisor Daily Cleaning
4. School Correspondence  
Compose and/or check the school's English correspondence.
5. Sister School Relations:
  - a. Setting up exchange programs
  - b. Letters to staff
  - c. Letter/video tape exchange
6. English Journal Supervisor
7. Assist in curriculum revision and design
8. Attendance at most school functions:
  - a. Monthly teacher meetings
  - b. Sports and cultural festivals
  - c. School closing and opening ceremonies
  - d. English meetings

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