

The Changing EFL Education System in Japan

変わる日本の英語教育

Hideo KOJIMA*

小嶋英夫*

Abstract

An educational reform in Japan is attempting to implement a new ELT (English Language Teaching) curriculum and syllabi in public institutions. This paper aims to consider recent large-scale changes in ELT in elementary, secondary, and tertiary education. Research was conducted into new strategies for EFL education, such as a Period for Integrated Study in elementary schools, content-based language instruction in Super English Language High Schools, and new English programs in national universities. Examples of successful innovations revealed the facilitating effect of two factors for innovation uptake: a) good communication and regular flow of feedback during process of implementation and b) administrative and peer support for the innovation. Teachers should keep in sight the longer view and move their students toward increasingly demanding challenges, so that no learning potential can be wasted.

Key words : EFL education, autonomy, communicative competence, integration of ELT from elementary through tertiary

1. Introduction

In the more closely linked global community that has resulted from developments in information technology, it has become increasingly important for Japanese people to develop pragmatic communicative competence and to be able to communicate effectively across borders. In Japan, Monbukagakusho, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) has been asserting more strongly than ever that Japanese people should have better command of English so that they can have close contact with foreign countries.

A recent educational reform in Japan is attempting to implement a new ELT (English Language Teaching) curriculum and syllabi, together with new methodologies and materials in public sector schools and universities. "Integration of ELT from elementary through tertiary" or "language policy to develop Japanese people's communicative competence through EFL (English as a Foreign Language) education from elementary through tertiary" is becoming an important issue in Japan. Schools and universities are now expected to conduct their activities so as to enable their students to learn English more autonomously and act more independently in response to various social changes in the 21st century. This paper deals with recent large-scale changes in EFL education from elementary through tertiary in Japan. New strategies for EFL education are all concerned with a particular innovation in ELT that has come about as a result of social and educational changes.

2. Autonomy in EFL education

In 1998 the Curriculum Council (Kyoiku Katei Shingikai), an advisory to the minister of education,

*弘前大学教育学部英語科教室

Department of English, Faculty of Education, Hirosaki University

stressed the concept of autonomy and encouraged not only children but also individual schools to develop their autonomy and act independently in response to various social changes. The purposes of national curriculum standard reform are¹⁾ :

- a) To help children cultivate their humanity, social maturity, and "zest-for-living"
... High value will be set on moral education which helps children acquire...strong will and **ability to take action, awareness of responsibility, autonomy, self-control...**
- b) To help children develop **ability to learn and think independently**
...the school education positively conducts its activities by emphasizing the importance of motivating children to **learn by themselves** and helping them develop **abilities to learn, reason, judge, express themselves accurately, discover and solve problems, acquire basic creativity and act independently** in response to social changes...
- c) To help children acquire basic abilities and skills and **develop their own individuality** with plenty of scope for educational activities
...considering children's interests, schools need to promote children's **independent learning** and to **further develop individualized instruction...**
- d) To encourage individual schools to show ingenuity in **developing unique educational activities to make the school distinctive**
...each school will be able to make its own timetable and curriculum in accordance with the actual situations of the community, school and children... (my bold)

With regard to EFL education, it aims to foster learner autonomy in language learning and particularly to develop students' practical communication skills for expressing their own thoughts and judgments effectively. In the new ELT context in Japan, where communicative competence is highly valued, it is clear that the notions of learner autonomy should be more strongly stressed in the communication-oriented language classroom.

As the theory and practice of English instruction enters a new century, the importance of developing learner autonomy has become one of its more prominent themes. In spite of agreement of its importance, there remains a good deal of uncertainty about its meaning and application for ELT. When attempting to promote autonomy in EFL education in Japan, the following definition, adapted from Sinclair,²⁾ appears to be one of the most comprehensive definitions of learner autonomy:

- a) Autonomy is a construct of capacity.
- b) Autonomy involves a willingness on the part of the learner to take responsibility for their own learning.
- c) The capacity and willingness of learners to take such responsibility is not necessarily innate.
- d) Complete autonomy is an idealistic goal.
- e) There are degrees of autonomy.
- f) The degrees of autonomy are unstable and variable.
- g) Autonomy is not simply a matter of placing learners in situations where they have to be independent.
- h) Developing autonomy requires conscious awareness of the learning process, i.e., conscious reflection and decision making.
- i) Promoting autonomy is not simply a matter of teaching strategies.
- j) Autonomy can take place both inside and outside the classroom.
- k) Autonomy has a social as well as an individual dimension.
- l) The promotion of learner autonomy has a political as well as psychological dimension.
- m) Autonomy is interpreted differently by different cultures.

Learner autonomy, which is stressed in educational reform in Japan, seems to be expected to have a

social as well as individual dimension. The start of a new academic year (2002) brought many changes to the public education system in Japan. It saw the full implementation of the five-day school week in public schools as well as the official introduction in elementary and lower secondary schools of the revised curriculum that aims to help students develop their abilities to learn more autonomously and act more independently in response to social changes in the global community. The main feature of the revised curriculum is the launch of a "Period for Integrated Study" (PIS) in the third year of primary school, a new interdisciplinary subject for which no common textbook has been issued in order to give individual schools more freedom to teach what they like more autonomously.

3. Innovation in elementary education

One of the most important changes in ELT in Japan, following similar moves in some other Asian countries, is the addition of English education to the elementary school curriculum. Under the new teaching guidelines, an increasing number of elementary schools are introducing English activities in their PIS classes, though Monbukagakusho does not specify that English must be taught in these sessions. In Japan, ELT is formally introduced to the public school curriculum in secondary education; therefore English activities in elementary schools are not aimed at improving children's English abilities, but rather at getting them used to foreign cultures to deepen international understanding. Fundamental concepts and examples, based on the research results of pilot schools, are discussed in *Practical Handbook for Elementary School English Activities 2001*.

3.1 Period for Integrated Study in elementary education

In an age characterized by progress in internationalization, computerization, and great strides in science and technology, there is a strong demand for school education to adjust in accordance to these changes in a prompt and appropriate manner. Under such circumstances, *the Elementary Course of Study* was revised. Its basic aims are to allow individual schools to pursue their own unique education initiatives, to cultivate students' humanity and social maturity, to educate them in fundamentals, and to encourage in them a "zest-for-living." With such aims in mind, the PIS has been created for schools to provide interdisciplinary, broad subjects such as international understanding, information technology, the environment, social welfare, and health, and to conduct educational activities based on the students' interests and needs.

3.2 Purposes of English activities

Elementary students seem to be keenly interested in new things and are at a stage where they can naturally absorb other cultures through languages and other means. Monbukagakusho thinks that exposure to English during these years is extremely important not only for developing communicative competence but also for deepening international understanding. English activities amount to experiences that expose students to other cultures, and serve as a media for promoting contact with people from other countries or contact with other cultures. Their primary purpose is to foster interest and desire — not to teach a language.

As of May 1, 2002, about 60% of public elementary schools were conducting English activities, according to survey by major municipal governments. Among them, 63% said that they planned to conduct these activities for between one and 11 hours this academic year, while 23% said that they planned between 12 and 22 hours and 11% said that they would do so between 23 hours and 35 hours. Only 2% said that they planned more than 36 hours a year of these activities, which would translate into at least one English class a week.

In the field of EFL education for elementary school students, schools will increasingly introduce

practical activities, while at the same time paying great attention to ensure that children do not develop a dislike for the language. In order to devise activities that prevent students from developing a dislike for English, it is very important to assess their levels, to determine English expressions with which they may already be familiar, to judge from their behaviors what they may want to do or say, and to use this information in creating English activities. In other words, the classes need to be student-centered.

3.3 Contents of study and types of activities included in English activities

The contents to be included in English activities are not fixed. Teachers are required to devise both the contents and the activities. In selecting the contents of study, the teacher must first understand the students' thoughts and desires. The selection of study contents begins with the teacher understanding what students exposed to English for the first time are interested in and what they expect. It is important for the teacher to develop learning activities that are consistent with the students' expectations and to promote participation in activities in which students are main actors.

Monbukagakusho suggests that English activities are to be pursued as experiential activities. Greetings, songs, games and other activities that allow students to speak English in a natural way are desirable. Monotonous repetition drills are ill-suited to the purposes of the PIS. Elementary school English activities basically focus on spoken English. According to Monbukagakusho's handbook,³⁾ the following points need to be considered:

- a) Focusing on spoken English
- b) Introducing what students want to say and do
- c) Introducing items found in the students' daily lives
- d) Selecting basic and useful expressions
- e) Including familiar topics with new perspectives
- f) Having students become aware of cultural differences through expressions and gestures used by foreign people
- g) Topics, materials, and subjects matching students' developmental stages

3.4 What are elementary schools doing to meet these requirements?

The new language policy might eventually bear fruit, but Japanese teachers in elementary schools who must teach English are in a quandary as to how to proceed. Although Monbukagakusho has designated some elementary schools as pilot schools, and has recently released the informative practical handbook, it has not clearly designated at what grade English education should begin, how much teaching should be done, or what curriculum should be used. Instead, and very unlike any educational guidelines ever produced before, Monbukagakusho has left these decisions to the elementary schools themselves.

Many elementary schools may receive help from native speakers of English who are called Assistant Language Teachers (ALTs). Recently, 25% of local governments have hired ALTs to teach English, about a third of whom teach at elementary schools. In addition, Monbukagakusho has stepped in for the first time and hired 20 ALTs with Japanese language ability to work in elementary schools. The activities may be designed so that children can learn English while having fun. Younger children may play games or sing songs, while older children may talk with native English speakers. It is important for children to communicate with foreign people and get used to the real usage of the foreign language.

Elementary students might have a good potential to smoothly adapt to English and early English education might later prove to be a great benefit for students. However, it is necessary to demonstrate that children possess the traits that are ideal for learning English: they are curious; they are energetic; they are enthusiastic and their enthusiasm is not only spontaneous but also contagious; they are not afraid of making mistakes; they like learning many phrases via English chants and songs; they trust the

teacher; they are receptive to new ideas and customs; they are worthy of respect because of their exceptional ability to absorb a foreign language and their innate potential.

As Cameron⁴⁾ suggests, teaching children needs all the skills of the good elementary teacher in managing children and keeping them on task, plus a knowledge of English language and of EFL learning and teaching. The professionalism of EFL teachers of elementary students may require an underpinning of theoretical knowledge that can help counteract prevalent misunderstandings about teaching young children: a) teaching children is straightforward and b) children only need to learn simple language. Elementary teachers must understand how children make sense of the world and how they learn, and have skills of analyzing learning tasks and of using language to teach new ideas to groups and classes of children. Children, who have huge learning potential, can be interested in topics that are more complicated, more difficult, and more abstract than we expect. Teachers should not patronize children by assuming limits to their interests, but change the syllabus and methodology as the child changes and grows, developing a learning-centered approach to EFL learning and teaching. Also, it should be noted that children might arrive in secondary schools with more diverse levels of English language than teachers have been accustomed to.

In contrast, there are conflicting opinions among the public, teachers, and academics. Those who are against teaching English to elementary students often state that English lessons in elementary schools are wasting valuable class time that could be used for other experiential learning. They also point out that the students who do not study English early will be at a disadvantage in secondary schools if their classmates have studied the language previously. Also, some wonder how elementary teachers can be given the opportunities to develop their abilities to teach English.

Kelly⁵⁾ points to the crux of the problem and suggests a solution:

We need to dig into the literature and find out everything we can about teaching children English. Then, we need to conduct a needs assessment on the training needs of Japanese elementary school teachers. And finally, once we figure out what we need to teach, we must find a means of delivery that can reach elementary school teachers all across Japan.

In addition, Kelly's⁶⁾ preliminary list of predicted training needs from his own research can be organized into seven topics:

- a) Theories on how children learn languages
- b) An understanding of what kind of English should be taught
- c) An understanding of *Monbukagakusho* policies
- d) An understanding of EFL methodologies
- e) EFL activities for children
- f) Evaluating and utilizing one's existing strengths and weaknesses
- g) Designing and planning lessons

It might end up doing more harm than good to set up a training program for elementary school teachers based on secondary school English teaching methods. Generally, the educational contexts are very different from each other between the two kinds of schools in Japan. Elementary teachers do not need to be competent in all areas of English because the language needed for classroom management and setting up and handling activities is fairly specific. We should identify exactly what language is typically used in English lessons, and to discover what activities are commonly used.

As for teacher training, Willis,⁷⁾ who stresses teacher talk in the elementary English classroom, states:

The overall goal should be to give teachers the confidence to speak English without being worried about making mistakes. The important thing is to use English fluently and naturally. If teachers can show children that English is a normal means of communication, like their own language, then after a spell children will naturally begin to use it where they can.

If the teacher's underlying attitude to using English is positive, and if it is obvious that the teacher enjoys speaking it, reading it and playing with it, and the teacher encourages and praises pupil's efforts to do the same, then children will develop confidence and be motivated to use English.

Schools today are expected to be more accountable for the quality of education they provide. They need to examine and evaluate themselves regularly and make as much information as possible available to the public. Proper evaluation by schools may enable them to share with the public information about their present situation and the issues they face. Schools should also join forces with parents and local communities to discuss what kind of education need to be offered to children. These new rules apply to kindergartens and secondary schools.

4. Innovation in secondary education

Compared with elementary education, it might be said that secondary education in Japan has more different and complicated problems, such as examination-oriented instruction versus communication-oriented instruction. In top-down change required to national systems, it is generally difficult for teachers to change their established teaching styles based on long-standing attitudes and beliefs. The real work of methodological reform remains in the hands of the autonomous schools and teachers.

The new study guidelines announced in 1998 and 1999, and introduced in lower and upper secondary schools in academic years 2002 and 2003 respectively seems to have a great influence on ELT in Japan. Foreign languages are now regarded as a required subject in lower and upper secondary schools, and in principle, English language is a compulsory subject in lower secondary schools. In order for students to develop practical communication skills in the target language, great emphasis is placed on practice in situations where the target language is actually used. Moreover, owing to the government's decision to end Saturday classes at public schools across the country, the number of classroom contact hours is reduced by an average of 30% for each subject, which eventually forces teachers to cram all the materials into 30% less time, or to find an alternative way to teach English.

Communication-oriented language instruction is much more heavily stressed in the classroom. Students at lower secondary school are expected to develop basic, practical communication skills, and listening and speaking skills are stressed. Students at upper secondary school need to develop communication abilities to understand information given and intentions shown by others as well as to express their own thoughts and judgments. The integration of the four skills has to be promoted.

4.1 Monbukagakusho's new strategies to develop EFL education

Some upper secondary schools in Japan that have been designated as Super English Language High Schools (SELHis) by Monbukagakusho are teaching other subjects in English. 18 SELHis all over Japan started to cultivate a variety of teaching methods to develop students' communicative competence and plan to teach other subjects in English this academic year so that students can be exposed to the language for a longer period of time. For example, teachers are considering performing English-language musicals during music classes and conducting cooking lessons in English during home-economics classes. SELHis might be able to engage in the following projects:

- a) Developing collaboration among English subjects
- b) Promoting immersion education
- c) Developing teaching methods for English ability grouping
- d) Making better use of long holidays with ALTs
- e) Enhancing cross-cultural understanding in the community
- f) Promoting computer-assisted language learning
- g) Developing collaboration with universities

h) Fostering teacher education inside and outside the school

Content-based EFL instruction is becoming a popular topic in Japan these days. It is "a programme in English as a second language in which the focus is on teaching students the skills they will need in regular classrooms, i.e. for learning in the content areas such as maths, geography, or biology"⁸⁾ The education principle is that students can absorb English along with the content of the course. If it is done right, content-based instruction may be a very effective way of teaching English.

Normally, content-based instruction in a new language is begun at a very early age when young brains can soak up a new language easily. Kato Gakuen in Shizuoka Prefecture operates a successful immersion program on this basis. "Content-based" language instruction generally means that a second language is used in teaching a subject other than the language itself. The word "immersion" generally means a school program in which 50 percent or more of the school day is conducted in a language other than the students' native language. At any age, learners may pick up meaningful language more easily than isolated pieces of language. In principle, then, content-based English is likely to be effective. The only caution is that new language must be within the zone of what the student is ready to learn next. Otherwise, new language falls on deaf ears.

SELHs have to decide to what extent they want classes to be content-based. Classes might begin with the English names for familiar things, such as symbols for the elements in chemistry, but gradually, English will be used for more complex things. One of the principles of successful content-based instruction is that material taught in English should not be repeated in Japanese. Students who have difficulty are given supplemental instruction in English, although classroom teachers, especially if they speak Japanese, may come under pressure to explain educational content in Japanese as well as English. In comparison with speakers of Japanese, native speakers of English may be less tempted to explain things in Japanese, and they may automatically produce normal English sounds, rhythms and intonations.

It is clear that the teachers and administrators at pilot schools can give good advice to the schools that are planning to introduce content-based programs. The goals and the expected results of a content-based program need to be explained honestly, sensitively, and as many times as necessary. It is reported that Monbukagakusho is planning to designate 100 schools as SELHs over the next three years.

Furthermore, Monbukagakusho has another plan to address the issue of the nation's poor speaking and listening skills. Among its proposals in July 2002 are: aiming for a speaking ability equivalent to three (san-kyu) of the tests administered by the Society for Testing English Proficiency (STEP, commonly known as Eiken) by the time students graduate from lower secondary school; reaching the second or pre-second level by the time students leave upper secondary school; introducing listening tests by the National Center for University Entrance Examination by fiscal 2006; and increasing the number of lessons per week by native-speaker ALTs, which would require increasing their numbers to at least 11,500.

4.2 Secondary school teachers' beliefs and attitudes toward innovation in ELT

Revisions in the guidelines are only the beginning of a process. Japanese teachers need to develop the professional theory of action through the integration of both practical and theoretical input, experience, and reflection. Individual efforts are surely effective for improving their command of English, whereas for innovating their approach to EFL instruction, it is very important to promote curriculum innovation, teamwork, and the management of change, enhancing their ability to make critical judgments, to exploit the social context of education and to actualize to their potential in complex change situations.

It is no doubt that teacher education needs to be promoted to develop teacher autonomy. However, through a comparative analysis of EFL teacher training systems and realities between European and Asian countries, Sasajima⁹⁾ suggests that Japan has somewhat different tendency for teacher training.

- a) The current EFL in-service training program in Japan will have to be improved in terms of professional development and teacher evaluation for teaching English at school, but not for their whole school work.
- b) EFL teachers at secondary school in Japan should be evaluated or appraised as professional teachers of English.
- c) EFL teachers should be assured of taking in-service training overseas.

In order to foster good English or other language teachers, Japan can learn a lot from the other Asian countries. For instance, Japan and the Republic of Korea have reformed the EFL education for more communicative goals in the past decade. According to Midorikawa,¹⁰⁾ who implemented a set of questionnaires to investigate how the teachers in both countries (92 Korean and 115 Japanese secondary school teachers) have adjusted their teaching to the goals, the major points of similarities and differences are:

- a) Korean teachers are engaged in Communicative Language Teaching more than Japanese teachers.
- b) Korean teachers spend much more time attending teacher-training work-shops for EFL teaching techniques and improving their own command of English than Japanese teachers.
- c) Japanese teachers feel the need of methodology workshops, while Korean teachers, of proficiency workshops.
- d) Teachers in both countries consider training in methodology and fluency still lacking.
- e) Teachers in both countries lack confidence in their command of English and knowledge of methodology.
- f) Almost half of the teachers in both countries still teach English in L1.
- g) Teachers in both countries find it difficult to leave work to participate in teacher-training workshops.

Judging from the above findings, Korean teachers seem to be more adjusted to the new communicative goals than Japanese teachers. This may be partly because in Japanese secondary schools preparation for entrance examination still has more importance than communication-oriented language learning and teaching. In order to enhance Japanese teachers' beliefs and attitudes toward EFL innovation, Monbukagakusho and the local education boards should provide a variety of opportunities for them to promote their professional development.

5. Innovation in tertiary education

As a result of the reform that has been spreading among national universities since 1991, universities in Japan can no longer remain ivory towers, and have come under serious pressure to reform their education independently for the 21st century. Both national universities and private universities have introduced their EFL education reform to the public. Independence and autonomy in Japan are to be promoted not only in the social context of the classroom but also in the organization and running of the universities.

5.1 Shaking the foundation of university system

In June 2001, the "university structural reform system policy," which was submitted to the government by Atsuko Toyama, minister of Monbukagakusho, was a bolt from the blue to the national, public and private universities in Japan. It emerged with no prior consultation by Monbukagakusho with the universities. The reform policy is so drastic that it is likely to force great transformations in Japanese university system. The reform consists of three pillars, which propose to:

- a) Boldly push reconstruction or integration of national universities.
- b) Shift the operation of national universities from the Japanese government to independently

administered National University Corporation (Kokuritsu-Daigaku-Hojin) in the earliest possible time.

- c) Raise the educational standards of the top national, public, and private universities to levels on a par with the top international universities.

Those who are against the reform policy are afraid that the reform policy will cause significant inconveniences and be a disservice to universities and people in Japan.

It is evident that "hojin-ka," the proposal to transfer to the management of national universities from the government to the independently administered institution, incorporating private-sector administration, came about as a result of the government's efforts to slash the number of public servants by 25% and the government's administrative costs by 30%, as part of the current government's administrative and fiscal reforms.

To date, the national and private universities in local cities of Japan have been able to provide large numbers of people with higher education opportunities, and have contributed to the promotion of academic and cultural standards as well as industry in Japan. They have achieved these accomplishments despite lower financial and resource foundations compared with the major national universities in large cities. Moreover, in recent years, many local universities have offered training programs to teachers and opportunities for lifelong learning to citizens, and have served as think tanks for local governments, medical institutions and industries.

Amid the ongoing drastic reform of universities, the significance of 75 local government-run universities has come into question. The reorganization or integration of existing national universities breaks the long-standing principles of "one national university in each prefecture." Coupled with the implementation of the policy of the "Top 30" universities with doctorate courses — accounting for 5 percent of the nation's universities — to which a larger share of government funding will be allotted, this might lead to the bankruptcy of many of local national, public as well as private universities. Such a situation might lower local academic and cultural standards, and it might accelerate an exodus of young generations to larger cities. Thus, doubts and opposition have been voiced among intellectuals and those associated with university education.

5.2 EFL curriculum innovation

In general, the freshman and sophomore English courses in Japanese universities are intended to prepare students for use of English in their fields of specialization. The overall goal of required courses might be the development of communicative competence in each academic context. Thus, in the pursuit of this goal, communication-oriented language instruction needs to be applied to all classes, and the traditional grammar-translation and rote-drill methods should be avoided in favor of a communicative curriculum in EFL teaching.

As Breen and Candlin¹¹⁾ suggest, any teaching curriculum should be designed in answer to the following three interrelated questions: What is to be learned? How is the learning to be undertaken and achieved? To what extent is the former appropriate and the latter effective? A communication-oriented EFL curriculum will place English teaching within the framework of this relationship between some specified purposes, the methodology which will be the means toward the achievement of those purposes, and the evaluation procedures which will assess the appropriateness of the initial purposes and the effectiveness of the methodology.

What follows is a consideration of some requirements for communicative language learning and teaching which need to be taken into account in curriculum design and implementation.

(1) The purpose of the curriculum

The communicative curriculum defines language learning as learning how to communicate as a member of a particular socio-cultural group. The social or interpersonal nature of communication

guarantees that it is permeated by personal and socio-cultural attitudes, values, and emotions. The overall purpose of language teaching is the development of the learner's communicative knowledge in the context of personal and social development.

(2) The ultimate demands on the learner

The ultimate demands on the learner in terms of some specific target repertoire will derive from and depend on the underlying competence of communicative knowledge and communicative abilities. The communicative knowledge can be seen as a unified system of ideational, interpersonal, and textual knowledge, which incorporates a range of affects. The communicative abilities call on and act on that knowledge, and the abilities of interpretation, expression, and negotiation are the essential or primary abilities within any target competence. The use of these communicative abilities is manifested in communicative performance through a set of skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. The skills are the meeting point between underlying communicative competence and observable communicative performance; they are the means through which knowledge and abilities are translated into performance, and vice versa.

(3) The learner's initial contributions

A communicative specification of purposes supports the principle that the roots of our objectives can already be discovered in our learners. The communicative curriculum seeks to facilitate the involvement of the learner's communicative knowledge and abilities from the outset. The curriculum will need to accommodate and allow for a heterogeneity of learner expectations, changes in different learners' perceptions of their needs, interests, and motivations. Curriculum purposes inform and guide methodology, and an account of learner expectations within purposes can enable methodology to involve these subjective contributions of the learner and, thereby, call on the genuine intersubjective responsibility of that learner.

(4) The methodology to achieve the curriculum purposes

Language learning within a communicative curriculum is most appropriately seen as communicative interaction involving all the participants in the learning and including the various material resources on which the learning is exercised. Language learning may be seen as a process which grows out of the interaction between learners, teachers, texts, and activities. Within methodology, differentiation is a principle which can be applied to the participants in the learning, the activities they attempt, the text-types with which they choose to work, and the ways they use their abilities. The classroom is only one resource in language teaching, but it is also the meeting-place of all other resources—learners, teachers, and texts. The authenticity of the classroom lies in its dual role of observatory and laboratory during a communicative learning-teaching process.

(5) The roles of the teacher and the learners

Within a communicative methodology the teacher has two main roles. The first main role of the teacher is to facilitate the communicative process between all participants in the classroom, and between these participants and the various activities and texts. The second main role is to act as an interdependent participant (co-communicator) within the learning-teaching groups. A third role for the teacher is that of researcher and learner — with much to contribute in terms of appropriate knowledge and abilities, actual and observed experience of the nature of learning, and organizational capabilities.

All learners of a language are confronted with the task of discovering how to learn the language. In their own ways all learners have to adopt the role of negotiation between themselves, their learning process, and the gradually revealed object of learning. Learners also have an important monitoring role in addition to the degree of monitoring which they may apply subjectively to their own learning. In expression and negotiation, the learner adopts the dual role of being a potential teacher for other learners and an informant to the teacher concerning his own learning progress. Essentially, a

communicative methodology would allow both the teacher and the learner to be interdependent participants in a communicative process of learning and teaching.

(6) The role of content

Language teaching curricula have often been traditionally defined by their content. However, the communicative curriculum would place content within methodology and provide it with the role of servant to the learning-teaching process. Thus, content would not necessarily be prescribed by purposes but selected and organized within the communicative and differentiated process by learners and teachers as participants in that process.

(7) The curriculum process to be evaluated

The communicative curriculum insists that evaluation is a highly significant part of communicative interaction itself. Evaluation of oneself, evaluation of others, or evaluation of self by others is intersubjective. We judge "grammaticality," "appropriateness," "intelligibility," and "coherence" in communicative performance on the basis of shared, negotiated, and changing conventions. Evaluative criteria would be established and applied in a three-stage process: "What might success mean?" "Is the learner's performance of the task successful?" "If so, how successful is it?" Communicative evaluation may well lead to adaptation of initial purposes, of methodology, and of the agreed criteria of evaluation themselves. The essential characteristics of evaluation within a communicative curriculum would be that such evaluation is itself incorporated within the communicative process of teaching and learning, that it serves the dual role of evaluating learner progress and the ongoing curriculum, and that it is likely to be formative in the achievement of this dual role.

5.3 New English programs in universities

Recently, Japanese universities have started implementing new English programs. While each educational institution operates under unique conditions and constraints, it is hoped that each research report will provide some general insight into the complex process of curriculum development by introducing the successes and challenges of one on-going process.

For example, the faculty members at University X, one of the most prestigious universities in Japan, launched a new English program as a part of the university's arts and science course in 1993.¹²⁾ The program is the result of attempt to offer courses that enables to comprehend what is being taught without depending on translation into Japanese. Before the 1993 reform, English teachers were divided into two main camps, with each criticizing the other's approach to language education. One camp comprised acolytes of literature, who taught the classics to freshmen and sophomores, claimed that the students should have contact with beautiful, literary English under the guidance of experts. In the other camp were instructors who seemed to adhere too fanatically to practical English training, aiming to make their students fluent speakers of the language. Of course, each has its good points, but students might not be able to learn English effectively either way. In order to put an end to the long-running conflict between the two factions and to establish a desirable educational atmosphere for students, Prof. A and Associate Prof. B aimed to expose learners to the world of "intellectual entertainment." This way, Prof. A thought, they would gain a wide range of knowledge through English, and come to realize that they were actually able to understand English. It is better for them to get involved in the learning activities — something long deemed impossible in large classes.

Although the audiovisual devices and textbooks have certainly played significant roles in improving the English program, there is no doubt that teacher enthusiasm was the real key to the success of the reform. Starting a new English program puts many demands on teachers in addition to their regular duties. University professors, who are only familiar with their own fields, may find it hard to prepare classes and deliver lectures like the ones being held at University X. Professors need to place as much value on teaching as on academic achievements.

The meaning of English education in universities lies in putting students in "an appropriate

environment," through which they are adequately exposed to ways of learning the language. If they acquire appropriate learning strategies, they will be able to reach a certain level of English proficiency in the future. Moreover, language learning consists of more than absorbing explicit information about a language. It involves the whole mind, conscious and unconscious, emotional and rational. The whole mind takes a long time to shift into a new mode, but it can do it if given the chance.

6. Conclusion

The important aims of educational reform in Japan are to establish the dignity of the individual, to have respect for individuality, and to provide each student with the opportunity to develop every aspect of his or her personality and abilities to the fullest. As a result of the popularization of higher education, English professionals can no longer expect all students to have equally high levels of language abilities and uniform academic interests. Japanese teachers, who traditionally expect to be viewed as authority figures, need to welcome their new roles as facilitators in the learner-centered classroom.

It is recognized that more teachers in Japanese schools and universities understand the necessity of developing an innovative curriculum for EFL education, which should encourage Japanese teachers to promote communication-oriented EFL learning and teaching. However, it should be noted that many Japanese teachers do not fully understand the important features of Communicative Language Teaching, the concept of learner autonomy, or the way to promote autonomous FEL learning. Setting up an autonomous learning environment that is not teaching-centered but learning-centered puts certain demands on teachers as well as learners. Teachers should keep in sight the longer view and encourage their students to develop learner autonomy, so that no learning potential can be wasted.

Notes

- 1) Monbukagakusho (The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology).1998. *National Curriculum Standards Reform for Kindergarten, Elementary School, Lower and Upper Secondary School and Schools for the Visually Disabled, the Hearing Impaired and the Otherwise Disabled*. Tokyo: MEXT.
- 2) Sinclair, B. 2000. "Learner Autonomy: the Next Phase." In B. Sinclair, I. McGrath, and T. Lamb (Eds.) , *Learner Autonomy, Teacher Autonomy: Future Directions*. 7-13 London. Longman.
- 3) Monbukagakusho. 2001. *Practical Handbook for Elementary School English Activities 2001*. Tokyo: Kairyudo.
- 4) Cameron, L. 2001. *Teaching Languages to Young Learners*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- 5) Kelly, C. 2002. "Training Japanese Elementary School Teachers." *The Language Teacher* 26 (7), 32.
- 6) *Ibid.*, 33.
- 7) Willis, J. 2002. "Teacher Talk in the Primary English Classroom." *The Language Teacher* 26 (7), 10.
- 8) Richards, J. C., J. Platt, and H. Platt. 1992. *Longman Dictionary of Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics*. Essex: Longman. 81.
- 9) Sasajima, S. 2002. "A comparative analysis of foreign language teacher training systems and realities between European and Asian countries." In M. Ishida et al. (Eds.) , *A Comprehensive Study of In-Service English Teacher Education in Japan: from status quo to renovations*. Tokyo: Teacher Education Research Group. 140-141.
- 10) Midorikawa, H. 2002. "English language teacher training in Japan and the Republic of Korea: a survey of Korean and Japanese EFL teachers' beliefs and attitudes." In M. Ishida et al. (Eds.), *A Comprehensive Study of In-Service English Teacher Education in Japan: from status quo to*

renovations. Tokyo: Teacher Education Research Group. 141.

- 11) Breen, M. P. and C. N. Candlin. 2001. "The Essentials of a Communicative Curriculum in Language Teaching." In D. R. Hall and A. Hewings (Eds.), *Innovation in English Language Teaching: A Reader*. 9-26. London: Routledge.
- 12) Sato, T. 1993. "English changes and Japan changes." *UP* 6. Tokyo: The University of Tokyo.

(Accepted July 31, 2003)