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Curriculum Renewal in a Hybrid Late Partial-immersion Program

Lori Zenuk-Nishide

Since the 1990's, there have been movements in Japan to make English language teaching more communicative following the Japanese Ministry of Education, Sports, Culture, and Technology (MEXT) action plan to cultivate "Japanese with English abilities" (MEXT, 2003); however their sphere of influence is only local.

It has been reported the norm for English language teaching in Japan, continues to rely on teacher centered grammar translation methods using Japanese in the classroom; and teachers with poor English proficiency, teach students to pass entrance exams that do not test communicative competence (Sakui, 2004; Taguchi, 2005; Nishino & Watanabe, 2008; Nishino, 2007). Teachers' beliefs about themselves and teaching could be could be the issue. I am going to introduce a local innovative communicative language teaching program I co-created and coordinated in a Japanese high school from 1989-2005, and the curriculum changes that were made to follow the 2003 MEXT guidelines. The course was created on beliefs about language acquisition and teaching pedagogy.

Since 1989, Kyoto Gaidai Nishi High School has had a three-year hybrid late partial-immersion English program as one of its courses of study, the Course of International and Cultural Studies (IC). In the course there are two classes ICA and ICB with different curriculums. For the purpose of this paper, ICA will be the focus. The school is an urban Japanese private high school affiliated with a university,

where all students in the late partial-immersion program have secured university placement after graduating from high school. Parents and students choose this program in light of the global society because of the values in improving English proficiency, international and inter-cultural communication taught daily by native English speakers. Many parents are willing to make an early decision to enroll their children in a program where they have secured university placement and the focus of their high school studies is not on college entrance exam preparation but rather to acquire competency in English as a means of international communication. Yashima (2000); (2009); Yashima et. al (2004); and Kimura et. al (2001) report that there is a growing interest in Japan in these programs.

The IC was started in 1989, at a time when there were no other immersion models in Japanese schools. The school did not know what effect a late partial-immersion English program would have on the academic, psychological or linguistic development of Japanese learners. Most immersion models in other countries started their programs at the preschool or elementary school level not high school. Research informed us that immersion was the best way to learn a foreign language in school (Genesee, 1983; Swain & Lapkin, 1982; Swain & Johnson, 1997).

The headmaster, Yoshitada Iwata, a progressive educator, was willing to experiment and, without his continued support, the program would not exist. The initial decision to establish a course was to meet two demands: one for intensive English instruction and the other, a growing interest in "internationalization". From its conception the course aimed for additive bilingualism instead of only teaching English as a subject. As the school has no elementary or junior high school, there was no option but to start a late immersion like program. As in partial-immersion programs, the percentage of L2 hours in the curriculum is about 50% for all three years (Genesee, 1983). With college bound high school students, the aim was to develop a pedagogy that would promote linguistic and cognitive

development in the L2, as well as mastery of content material. Given these goals, the program design was influenced by three pedagogical approaches, whole language, content-based and English for academic purposes.

Government Restrictions

There are restrictions set by the national and local boards of education. The national government sets the minimum number of compulsory credits for classes and approved texts as well as the total number of credits that can be taught per week. With the 2003 national curriculum renewal, the government encouraged schools to develop their own classes in addition to the compulsory classes.

The local board of education is responsible for teacher licensing. In the city where the school is located, English teachers without Japanese English teaching qualifications from a Japanese university need a master's degree in TESOL and can only be licensed to teach one subject. To teach a subject other than English in English, subject teachers have to have had graduated from a Japanese university and pass exams in Japanese to get a teacher's license. It is difficult to find teachers who meet the licensing criteria.

Effects of Government Policy on Curricular Decision Making

In most immersion programs (Swain & Johnson, 1997), the immersion curriculum parallels the local curriculum but in this case it didn't. A hybrid partial-immersion curriculum was developed taking into account government restrictions. The school were unable to teach the compulsory curricular requirements in English other than the teaching of the language itself due to licensing restrictions. Since the IC course started, only the minimum number of credits in compulsory subjects (other than Japanese and History) required by the government are taught in the IC curriculum. Officially, half of the school's immersion curriculum is registered with the government as elective English classes, which are refered to as the content classes taught in English.

Students

In the partial immersion program ICA class there are about 120 students, 40 in each class and one class per grade level, between the ages of 15 and 18. All of the students have studied English for at least 3-years. Students place into the program on the basis of a competitive entrance exam. The English component of the exam consists of a reading cloze, dictation and grammar sections. Historically, a large number of females have sat for the exam, providing a 90% female population. The student population is homogenous in terms of L1, cultural background, and English language proficiency. They are generally highly motivated students of high academic ability in their first language coming from privileged backgrounds. In every class there have been a few students who come from multicultural families or families that have lived abroad in an English speaking country. The average entrance proficiency level of students is 350 on the paper-based Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL), novice-mid on The American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages Oral Proficiency Interview (ACTFL OPI) and 1320 words on the Eurocentres Vocabulary Size Test (EVST) vocabulary size test. The highest average exit proficiency has been 495 for TOEFL, intermediate-mid for the ACTFL OPI and 4587 words on the EVST vocabulary size test. Our students achieve much higher levels of L2 competence in all four skills than students in traditional classrooms but do not achieve native-like competence as do other studies on immersion show (Johnson & Swain, 1997; Cummins, 1995).

Tertiary Placement

In the early years of the program students were led to believe that IC could not challenge university entrance exams to top level Japanese universities and the first students who did went against their advisors only to prove that they could even though about half of their studies were in the L2. Like their counterparts in regular Japanese programs they attended cram schools or sought extra help

from subject teachers. The majority of graduates attend the affiliated university to continue studying languages, while others enter Japanese private universities or universities abroad in the Australia, China, England, France, New Zealand, and the United States to study in various fields.

IC Parents

The IC course communicates with the parents about activities through letters, the school wide quarterly magazine, special orientations, parent-teacher interviews, questionnaires made by the course and overseas trip meetings. Two parents from each class join the school's parent-teacher association. Only in the early years of the program were regular open classes for the parents to observe. Now, parents are invited to watch the biggest student projects of the course, such as the 3-day Model United Nations in English. Parents have been asked to speak on behalf of the course to talk to Junior high parents and students and to speak at the first new student orientation. Prospective students and families are encouraged to visit the school and recruiters visit the area public junior high schools. There are frequent recruiting fairs held and our school holds open classes with a program explanation.

Parents or teachers have often organized and met to focus and express concerns over class issues. As a course we were always been willing to work together with the parents to discuss difficult issues and work toward resolution. When the course was being designed there was no parental involvement.

IC Staff

The immersion program, from it's inception, was a top-down decision that was unpopular in the school. The course of study couldn't be compared to anything that existed to date in Japan and still, after many years, few Japanese faculty request to teach or be a homeroom teacher in the program. The course with its innovation is very

intense, time consuming, and bilingual by nature.

There are 11 full-time native English speaking teachers that have come from the Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, and the United States on staff. Teachers have never come to the program with immersion teaching experience so there is in-service training by veteran staff. Their schedule consists of thirteen, 45-minute classes per week and teachers are responsible for curriculum development for two content-based units with a team and on their own for other compulsory content classes, project classes and elective classes. They administer and teach units throughout the academic year and have committee responsibilities in unit teams, in the course and school and attend staff meetings in Japanese. Many of the teachers are advisors a club or circle, though it is not compulsory. All of the teachers on a rotational basis will have a homeroom for three years with a native Japanese-speaking partner and will also chaperone overseas seminars.

Bilingual Homeroom Teacher Responsibilities

Homeroom teachers, meet with their students 10 minutes every morning and after regular lessons to take attendance, make announcements and clean the classroom. There is also one period per week that is for homeroom activities. Homeroom teachers look after the pastoral care for the class, student activities, academic records and post-secondary placement. Twice a year they are required to do parent and student conferencing. In addition, there are a number of course and school events at each grade level in which homeroom teachers are directly involved in the planning and implementing, such as a bilingual spring camp in the first year and community service in second and third year. In the homeroom generally, Japanese teachers use Japanese and foreign teachers use English. With the presence of both teachers the learners are always alert to listen or speak in either language. Students of each homeroom share the same timetable, except for elective classes that are scheduled at the end of the

day.

Reasons for Curriculum Change in 2003

The initial impetus of change was a direct result of the reformation process for both elementary and secondary education established by the Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, effective as of 2003. These changes have directly influenced the total number of class hours and their distribution. Although students are now exposed to the study of English earlier in elementary school, the number of hours in grammar and vocabulary are considerably less than before the reformation. For the nine years following 2003, it is anticipated that students will generally begin upper secondary school with a consistently falling rate of overall comprehension. In addition to academic changes, students are also experiencing changes in lifestyle, especially concerning extra-curricular activities and have become liberated in some ways. It was a main goal of the IC to adapt to not only the current student population, but also with the future entering classes.

Along with the standardized changes, a consensus was achieved through discussion amongst the IC staff to: (1) offer learners more choices within the curriculum; (2) incorporate teacher autonomy; (3) expose students to a greater variety of fields; (4) reduce the work demands on students outside of class time imposed by projects for writing and speaking classes; and (5) increase class time for project work and extend the deadlines for completion of projects for output classes. In order to accommodate the goals (1), (2) and (3), new compulsory elective classes were developed, bringing in a larger variety of registers, ideas, vocabulary and content. These classes are taught by individual teachers, in contrast with unit teams of three or four teachers who coordinate lessons, develop an input-rich term-length course distinct from the fields covered in any of the thematic units of the three-year curriculum and that recycles points of skill and grammar previously taught. As these classes are input-rich, the

classes are divided into groups of approximately 13 in order to maintain a low student-teacher ratio. An added feature is that the compulsory elective teachers are different from the unit teachers in order to maximize student exposure to teaching styles and customs of different native speaking instructors.

To accommodate goals (4) and (5) mentioned above, the writing and speaking classes were combined into an output class, in effect decreasing the number of tasks students are assigned and increasing the amount of class time for construction, assembly and practice. The number of thematic units of the three-year course was reduced from the original curriculum and made to term-length, generally estimated to be 12-weeks, whereas before the change, units tended to be six-weeks long. This helped to compensate the decrease in weekly hours with an increase in the total number of hours within each unit.

Reconstructing the Old curriculum to Fit New Goals

From the conception of the three-year IC Course, instruction has been based on a thematically integrated process-product, whole-language, theme-based approach that focuses on utilizing Academic English and recycling grammar structures throughout the 4-skills. Throughout the years of refinement and adaptation, the difficulty at the time of revision was in preserving this essence for the new curriculum. As stated above, the total number of hours had been decreased, in effect necessitating the changes. However, the themes, materials and texts of most five-week units were combined or altered and then lengthened considerably into seven 10-week units, approximately half of what the old basic curriculum offered. Aside from the unit classes of the former curriculum, the two two-year content-driven compulsory courses, Foreign Affairs and Comparative Cultures, were incorporated into the unit themes and three new classes emerged, projects, electives and skills-based classes. The content-based project classes are thematically integrated with the units, but students can choose which unit projects they want to do. Compulsory

elective classes are also content-based, but are thematically different from any unit within the three-year curriculum. To support all other classes, a weekly three-year reading skills and vocabulary class was developed in order to help students improve overall comprehension.

The Basic Unit, Project, Elective, and Skills-based Classes

The basis of the overall curriculum has been and remains to be based on units that encompass the 4-skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing. Until 2003, each of the skills were taught in separate classes, though integrated. However, because of the limitations imposed by the Ministry of Education, the total number of different classes that could be offered was limited. As a result, listening and reading classes were combined into the Input class (approximately 20 students) and speaking and writing became the Output class (approximately 13 students). One loss due indirectly to the changes was the reading of in-class novels that had crossed the 4-skills, primarily done because units were extended to 10 weeks.

Project classes, integrated with the Input and Output classes of the basic unit and consisting of approximately 13 students, are also content-driven and theme-based and are presentation, writing or performance activities, a range depending on individual teachers. The presentation projects can take the form of research, video conferencing, power point, or speech presentations. Writing projects can be one of a variety of essay styles, writing portfolios, and newspaper projects. Performance projects may be the production of a musical, play, video, or puppet show. At the end of each unit, the three different project classes hold an inter-classroom presentation.

Elective classes are input-rich, teacher-centered classes based on the 4-skills that recycle skills and grammar points taught in past units yet are not thematically related to the field of any unit in the three-year curriculum. The end results of these classes are oral or written group or individual projects. Like the Project classes, elective classes are chosen by second- and third-year students, one class per

10-week term, and consist of approximately 13 students.

Reading Skills and Vocabulary class (RSV) is a mandatory weekly class designed to improve a learner's individual level and general ability in reading and comprehending texts and are entirely skills-based and thus not thematic nor integrated with units. The basic elements of RSV are explicit study of various reading skills and vocabulary and silent reading time. The reading skills cover such skills as learning to read faster, skimming, scanning, identifying structures in written texts, and developing prediction. For explicit individualized vocabulary study, students are given the 2000 most frequent word lists and the Academic Word List and search for words with which they are unfamiliar and make flash cards. On the cards, learners write the word, its pronunciation, and collocations on one side and the definition on the other. For each testing term and long vacation, students are asked to learn 100 new words. Students are tested on 10 cards and if they mistake more than two words, they are asked to study the same set of cards for the next testing period. Throughout the three years of the curriculum, students have the opportunity to acquire over 1,500 new words. The silent reading time occupies approximately 20 minutes of each class. Students choose books from the graded reader library in which they are interested and can understand 98-99% of the text. After the reading of a book, students write a book report explaining about the story, their favorite part, and their opinion about the book and of the level of the book for them. After reading five books of the same level and that are just the right level for them, students advance to a higher level. Every testing term, students are assigned to read over 2,000 pages of text in the course of three years.

Supplementary Immersion Activities

In addition to unit, project, elective and skills classes, there are also mandatory classroom activities, mandatory outreach activities, individual options within the curriculum and voluntary outreach

activities. Mandatory activities consist of the ITP TOEFL, ACTFL OPI and Nation's Vocabulary Size Test in order to test general reading and listening comprehension, writing and speaking abilities and general vocabulary size. The ITP TOEFL and the ACTFL OPI are done twice, once upon entrance to the program and once at the end of the third year. Nation's Vocabulary Size Tests are done three times, once at the beginning of each academic year.

Mandatory outreach activities vary in terms of exposure to English, frequency and involvement. These activities in English include a six-week full-immersion in New Zealand, three-day interschool Model United Nations held, international visitors, presentations and assemblies by and/or for students. Other bilingual activities held in both English and Japanese include community service activities, camp, video conferences, daily classroom report journal, weekly long homerooms, and twice daily short homerooms. During the six-week full-immersion, students are assigned in groups of approximately nine to schools in New Zealand where they attend about six classes per day and live with English speaking homestay families. The trip also includes tours in the country and short stays and group tours in other countries.

Students have some individual options within the curriculum that include TOEFL and Eiken (an English proficiency exam produced in Japan) classes and short- and long-term study abroad. Of the first class that has entered the curriculum since the 2003 changes, one-third have gone abroad for one year during their high school time. Students have gone to Australia, Canada, France, Hungary, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, and the United States. The high school offers full and partial scholarships to a limited number of students for study abroad in Canada, New Zealand, and the United States.

Voluntary outreach activities are available to students and include visits to the English-speaking teachers' office, hosting short- and long-term exchange students, entering speech and essay contests,

joining English speaking clubs and interacting with international students attending the school. English-based clubs include Habitat for Humanity Campus Chapter, Save the Earth Society, Communication in Action, International Club and a music band.

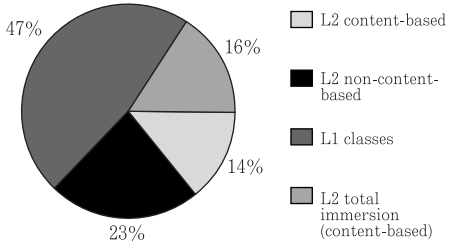
1st Year

Table 1. *Curriculum changes in the first year curriculum*

Old curriculum	Current curriculum
Me & My World Folktales, Myths and Legends Wizard of Oz Food Art	Me & My World Overseas Seminar

The units of the basic three-year curriculum were based on the integration of content throughout the 4-skills and were redesigned for the reformation. Table 1 shows the units of the old and the new first-year curriculum. Here, we were able to keep elements of language learning such as description, essay development, Academic English, note taking, presentation, sentence-level comparison. In addition to these, through the Overseas Seminar Unit, we transferred from the former second-year curriculum study abroad pre-paration, compare-contrast, ethnographic research, opinion, and objective and subjective writing skills. However, because of the loss of the texts that cross skills, the class reading of a novel, narration, musical production and paragraph-level and discussion of compare/contrast discourse were lost or transferred to a unit in the current second-year curriculum. In consideration of the complete curriculum for the first-year students, over 50% is either entirely or partially in English (Figure 1).

Figure 1 Current 1 ICA



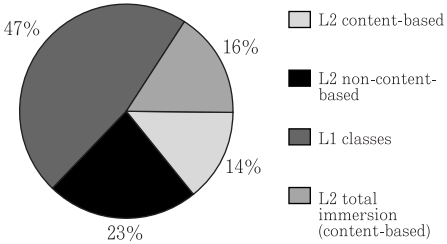
2nd Year

Table 2. *Curriculum changes in the second year curriculum*

Old curriculum	Current curriculum
Health Newspaper Boston Seminar Education	Creative Expression Global Issues War and Peace

The second-year curriculum as explained in Table 2 has maintained teaching language elements such as problem-solution relationships, cause-result-solution relationships, critical thinking, persuasive writing, pro-con debate pre-paration and execution. Elements from the previous first-year curriculum that have been preserved in the current second-year curriculum are compare-contrast discourse relating to art and music and also choices in the study of Global Issues concerning such issues as religion, AIDS, women's issues and human rights. With the loss of the "Newspaper" Unit, we no longer create newspapers, though we have preserved dissection of long sentences and reading newspapers. Of the second-year curriculum as a whole, 50% is entirely or partially in English (Figure 2).

Figure 2 Current 2 ICA



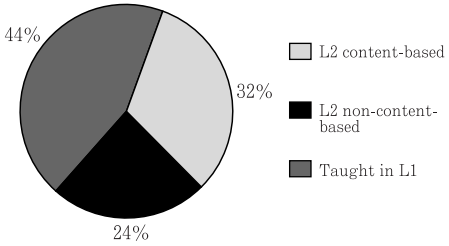
3rd Year

Table 3. *Curriculum changes in the third year curriculum*

Old curriculum	Current curriculum
War and Peace Model United Nations Futures	Model United Nations Human Condition

The third year curriculum, as shown in Table 3, continues to focus on research, formal and informal debate, and presentation as a delegate of a foreign country. The new unit "Human Condition" delves into stages of life, human needs, and emotions experienced through short stories, poetry, and film. In the former curriculum, the "Futures" Unit contained the study of a short political work, both in the form of a novel and film, but was moved out of the basic curriculum after reformation. In addition, the former "War and Peace" Unit contained the production of a musical, a creative writing portfolio, and biographical essay writing, including a thesis statement and persuasive support. Fifty-six percent of the third-year curriculum is currently taught in English, either entirely or partially (Figure 3).

Figure 3 Current 3 ICA

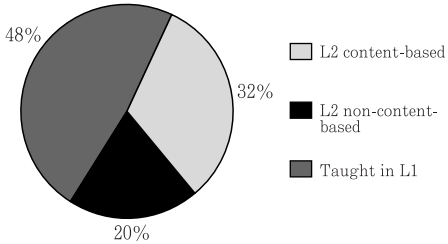


The school year in Japan has three terms. The first and second terms have two 5-week learning sessions each. The third term for first- year students is not recorded as they spend most of the time in New Zealand. Third-year students have only two weeks before their final testing week. Second-year students have a 10-week learning session with one testing time for the third term. Testing for classes taught by L2 native-speaking instructors are cumulative and summative. Additionally, class participation, homework and projects account for the majority of credit awarded.

Language and the Curriculum

For students enrolled in the IC Course, classes are taught in the L1 only, L2 only, or a combination of both. In content-based L2 classes, the language of instruction is English only. In most non-content-based classes, the language of instruction fluctuates in quantity of the L1 and L2. Factors for this fluctuation include preparation of events (school-wide vs. course events) and teachers (L1 speaking teachers whose language of instruction of the L2 is L1, L2 or a combination of both). The hours of each type of class and also the total number of hours of classes per day are different each year, however, the overall average of the language of the instruction is approximately even, as can be seen in Figure 4.

Figure 4 ICA three-year average



Conclusion

In addition to increased communicative competence as a result of the IC course, Yashima and Zenuk-Nishide (2008) found significant change in student attitudes after studying English in the course for three years.

> English became more a part of their natural life, there were positive changes in affect about communicating in English, less anxiety, more willingness and enjoyment; also there was an awareness that English opens doors to the international community as a tool; they developed stronger motivation to study harder and communicate better; and finally to understand the difficulty involved in learning. (p.583)

This hybrid late partial-immersion program at one school provides opportunities for students who enter with a low English proficiency to study academic content in English, locally and internationally. The syllabus and curriculum, before and after the 2003 curriculm change, include a theoretically based rationale that is both content and language driven.

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