# Evaluating one Japanese high school's system of Oral Communication course evaluation

## Alex Small

The University of Birmingham

MA TEFL/TESL

Open Distance Learning

Module 5 assignment

Submitted: Feb 2009

---

**Assignment question MN/08/08:**

Describe and evaluate the formative and summative evaluation procedures employed for an English language project or programme with which you are familiar. Say how and why you might change these procedures.

**Table of Contents**

**Appendices**

# 1 Introduction

Oral Communication I (hereafter OCI) was launched in 1989 by MEXT as a program to improve the speaking abilities of Japanese high school students. It proposed a communicative approach and a change from exclusive grammar translation education. However, there is little to show for MEXT's efforts as there has been little improvement in English proficiency in secondary schools in Japan. (Reesor 2003:61)

This paper will:

- Show that at the local level, little has changed in teacher practice in the last 20 years. The Ministry is too far removed from the local institutions to affect change.

- Demonstrate that at the level of institution, courses are not individually evaluated in the sense described in ELT literature (White 1988, White et al. 1991, Rea-Dickins and Germaine 2001, etc.)

- Explain that due to lack of an evaluative framework and dearth of formative evaluation (ethnographic) data, examination and explanation of why the course has been unsuccessful is nearly impossible. Additionally, improvements to curriculum are hindered.

- Suggest plausible, realistic improvements to the evaluation systems at local high schools by which examination and improvement of OCI can be facilitated.

In evaluating and suggesting improvements there is a risk of being culturally insensitive. Education in Japan is seen as a way of transmitting tradition (White et al. 1991:171) and suggesting methods of evaluation that are "Western" and possibly run counter to the purpose of Japan's school system is perhaps naïve. This paper will merely present an outsider's perspective of the system and due to the limitations of the assignment focus

only on one course's evaluation and not it's larger place in the school system and Japanese culture.

## 2 General background of OCI

The Oral Communication I course exists alongside the English I course for first year high school students. English I is comprehensive, covering all the 'four skills' (MEXT 2002:109), while OCI is meant to focus on speaking and listening proficiency (see Appendix 1 for a full curriculum description). This section will explain how OCI came into being as a separate class, and contrast its intended implementation with its actual implementation at the local level.

### 2.1 Origins of OCI

The OCI program is not the first attempt in Japan to improve students' oral/aural proficiency in secondary schools. In the 1920s and again in 1956, the government tried with the help of foreign advisors to break grammar translation's hold with a focus on spoken English. Both of these innovations were rejected at the local level, and grammar translation retained its position of prestige (Fujiimoto-Adamson 2006, Reesor 2003:62).

The current OCI program was laid out by MEXT in the 1989 Course of Study, and was made mandatory for all high schools in 1994 (Taguchi 2002). The Course of Study's design was motivated in part by the Japanese business community, which wanted greater practical speaking proficiency from young graduates (Interview with Teacher A, Appendix 2). The model of OCI's implementation was top-down (Taguchi 2002). Typical of this style of change, the proposers of change and implementers are different

people, leading to difficulties caused by a mismatch in beliefs (O'Donnell 2005:301, Kennedy & Edwards 1998:46-50) and token implementation of policy (Kennedy & Edwards 1998:60; Morris 1992, 1995 cited in Carless 2001:263) which the next section will explain.

## 2.2 Implementation of OCI in high schools

Individual schools are responsible for designing their curriculum (Browne & Wada 1998:107), but must implement MEXT's Course of Study. Literature on the OCI program reveals that little has changed in classroom practice and language proficiency since 1994. OCI is described as a "charade" (Porcaro 2006:157) because it does not meet MEXT's objectives, tends to focus on reading skills and class time is used by some teachers for additional grammar instruction (Taguchi 2002). Textbooks' teacher's manuals tend to define the syllabus in Japanese public schools (Porcaro 2006:156), but none of the texts approved for use by MEXT meet the Ministry's stated communicative aims (Reesor 2003:61, Browne & Wada 1998:105). Instead, instruction is typically focused on reception of language knowledge (Reesor 2003:61).

The training in educational theory that teachers must undergo in their undergraduate studies to get a teaching license is very limited, as are opportunities for in-service communicative training (See table X) and in the absence of theory teachers are strongly influenced by traditional grammar translation methodology and pressure to prepare students for university entrance examinations (Taguchi 2002, O'Donnell 2005:303). Teachers may be labeled "deviants" if they don't follow traditional methodology (O'Donnell 2005:302). A lack of theory guiding teachers leads them to draw their own

conclusions about OCI's aims (Taguchi 2002) and some focus on the goal of "fostering

a positive attitude toward communication" (see appendix 1 for the course description)

instead of language proficiency (Taguchi 2002).

**Table 1: Summary of high school teacher pre-service and in-service training**

| Pre-service training | |
|---|---|
| Teachers license training | The teachers license training course is only available to university students taking a related major. The training for English teachers does not require the study of communicative methodology (Reesor 2003:63). The only two requirements for completing training are:<br>● Two weeks of practice teaching in a school. (Browne & Wada 1998:101)<br>● Passing a written test on the subject matter (ibid.)<br>NOTE: Browne and Wada (ibid.) show in a survey of high schools of one prefecture that over half of English teachers are English Literature majors, and get little exposure to linguistics or pedagogy in their studies. |
| **In-service training** | |
| New teachers | ● First-year teachers receive a one-year induction training. (Gorsuch 2001) |
| Board of Education Workshops | ● Training seminars are offered by prefectural and municipal boards of education, and thus vary in quality and quantity nationally. (Gorsuch 2001)<br>● The workshops are typically very short. (Gorsuch 2001, Browne & Wada 1998:108)<br>● Some workshops are limited only to few teachers due to budgets (Browne & Wada 1998:109) or are offered on a voluntary basis (Taguchi 2002). |

As a result, students' English proficiency has changed little since the Course of Study's implementation (Reesor 2003:61). Furthermore, teacher difficulties in implementation and complaints to administrators by teachers led MEXT to change OCI from a mandatory class for all first year high school students across Japan to giving individual schools the choice of including it in their curriculum or not (interview with Teacher B, appendix 3). The Ministry did not publicize their change of course, as it would be seen as an admission of error (Appendix 3). It's impossible to say what other factors influenced the MEXT's decision, but as section 3 will explain, there is no tradition of individual course evaluation at individual schools, which may have encouraged an 'accept or reject' mindset in teachers instead of providing a channel for suggesting improvement.

## 3 Description of evaluation procedures

This section will outline the evaluation procedures for OCI at a Japanese high school where I work. The description is based on information provided by a Japanese teacher of English at the school (see appendix 2 for a detailed summary). According to the teacher, evaluations of course success and decisions to change curriculum are done "instinctively" and not based on analysis or research, which is consistent with Gorsuch's (2001) observation that high school teachers are not trained in the tools for analyzing their teaching. There is no procedure, then, for evaluating individual courses. However, departments are evaluated as a whole by several methods, and this section will describe those which are relevant to OCI's speaking and listening curriculum. It is important to note that the school places emphasis on English teaching and uses many

tests. The evaluation procedures should not be considered typical for Japanese public high schools with OCI programs.

In a given school year, three types of evaluation are used: summative, formative, and accountability. I will use Williams and Burden's following definitions of summative and formative evaluation in describing the school's procedures:

> Generally, [summative evaluation] involves selecting groups of students or teachers and administering appropriate tests at the beginning and end of the programme in order to investigate whether any changes found could be attributed to the innovation itself.
>
> […]
>
> [Formative evaluation is] where the very process of evaluation helps to shape the nature of the project itself and therefore increases the likelihood of its successful implementation. Formative evaluation involves evaluating the project from the beginning. It is ongoing in nature, and seeks to form, improve, and direct the innovation rather than simply evaluate the outcomes.
>
> (1994:22)

Although Rea-Dickins and Germaine (2001:253-4) link accountability with summative evaluation, in this paper the term will describe procedures that other stakeholders use to hold teachers accountable. Although they do not directly evaluate the course, they are described as they will form the basis for suggestions for improvement in section 5.

**3.1 Summative evaluation**

*Entrance examinations to the school*

In order to enter the high school, students must pass an entrance examination. Students are admitted to the school if they meet its minimum academic expectations, and English abilities are included in the exams. Presumably, results on the test determine a baseline of students' English vocabulary and listening abilities for OCI.

*TOEIC Bridge and GTEC Basic tests*

All students at the school take TOEIC Bridge and GTEC Basic tests yearly; the TOEIC Bridge in April and GTEC in June. Both the tests are designed for beginning and intermediate learners, and test listening, reading, and writing (ETS 2008, Benesse Corp. 2008). The effectiveness of the OCI listening curriculum can be examined by comparing students' listening scores at the beginning of the course and after its completion.

*OCI Presentation grading scale*

In OCI students give two presentations, which are graded according to criteria developed by the school. There are four areas which are graded: voice/pronunciation, eye contact, speech content, and preparation, each with a possible A, B, C grade and descriptions of grading criteria. The first two areas graded are based on the school English department's spoken English grading scale (appendix 4) which is applied to all the school's courses. The criteria are meant to objectively measure presentation skills across individual classes and school years.

*University entrance examinations*

Preparation for these tests is widely believed by teachers, students, and parents to be the main purpose of high school education at academic-track schools (O'Donnell 2005:301, Browne & Wada 1998:97, Gorsuch 2001). As a result, students' success or failure on these exams reflects on the English department's curriculum.

The influential Center Exam (the most widely used standard entrance exam in public universities) added an English listening section in 2006 (Murphey 2006), and some private university exams have listening sections as well. OCI listening instruction at the school can be evaluated in part by students' performance on these exam sections.

## 3.2 Formative evaluation

*English department attitude survey*

All students are given this survey once a year (Appendix 5 is a full, translated version of the survey). The survey asks students about their attitudes toward English, what they feel their strong and weak points are, and background information about hours of study outside of high school instruction.

*Teacher meetings*

OCI teachers meet weekly or bi-weekly to discuss the course. Teachers discuss their progress through the textbook, what textbook units to test students on, and teacher-made supplementary materials. Textbooks and tests are not evaluated in the meetings, but teacher-made materials used are reflected upon, and teachers suggest improvements to

each other. This is significant because these materials are the basis for classroom drills and are a large part of the curriculum.

## 3.3 Accountability evaluation

This section will focus on evaluations of teachers done by the institution's other stakeholders: the administrators, parents, and students. These channels are among the few available to them, although the focus is mainly on teachers and not the course.

*Observations by school administrators*

Classes are observed by administrators who prepare a checklist of points ahead of time. The administrators are primarily interested in bad student behavior such as sleeping, and how the teacher carries him or herself. Teachers get feedback after the observed lessons, and can incorporate administrators' advice into future lessons.

*Open School*

Once or more a year, classes are opened for observation to parents and teachers of other schools in scheduled 'open school' events. Parents may offer complaints or compliments, but no procedure exists to formally solicit their evaluations.

*Student attitude questionnaires*

Once every semester students are given a generic questionnaire with which they must evaluate all their teachers' classes from every department. Questions ask students to reflect on their behavior, and to rate their teacher's performance (Appendix 6 is a full,

translated version of the questionnaire). The ratings are compiled by the teachers for

school administrators and prefectural authorities.

*Student-teacher talk*

Although limited only to students confident and motivated enough to talk directly to the

teacher, students can make their opinions about problems with teaching style and speed

of progression through course materials known.

*Parent complaints*

Parents who have complaints of their own or to make on their children's behalf

telephone the school administrators, and the administrators pass the complaint to the

teacher. This type of complaint is considered serious, and can force a teacher to change

his or her methods, techniques, or classroom behavior.

## 4 Evaluation of evaluation procedures

This section will suggest that the evaluation procedures in place are inadequate for

monitoring as important an innovation as OCI which challenges a long-standing norm.

As White et al. (1991:176) explain:

> "It is foolhardy to assume that because something has been set in motion, it will automatically
>
> reach a desired conclusion. Keeping an eye on things is a vital function of evaluation."

While there is a wealth of summative data, it focuses on only listening skills. The

scarcity of formative evaluation makes explaining success or failure and suggesting

improvements for practice difficult. The links between evaluation and accountability also create a negative impression.

This section will show that managing the innovative OCI program is difficult without focused evaluation, and that each type of evaluation done at the school has limitations which should be addressed.

## 4.1 Lack of focus on the OCI program

Because the OCI program is evaluated at the school in the same way as long-standing courses like English I, the evaluation process does not provide the level of feedback necessary to successfully shape an innovation. There is little tangible information available from the school to explain why students are not learning to communicate in English.

Because of the belief-challenging nature of OCI, a lack of guiding evaluation process hinders improvements to teaching practice. The risk is that the Ministry may implement further top-down discontinuous change (Kennedy & Edwards 1998:72) that may not take local stakeholder concerns into account (Kennedy & Edwards 1998:45-50), or that the focus on oral English could again be abandoned in favor of tradition.

## 4.2 Summative evaluation

*High school entrance exams*

Teachers planning the OCI curriculum can determine a baseline for students' listening skills and vocabulary. However, the test gives no information about speaking abilities.

11

Also, because the test is taken only once its ability to be compared with tests after the course is limited.

*TOEIC Bridge and GTEC*

Students' scores on these tests are directly comparable year to year and can clearly show improvements to listening skills. Also, because the two tests are similar the data is more reliable. Finally, listening skills are a main component of MEXT's goals so the tests can provide a positive washback effect.

*OCI Presentation grading scale*

While the presentation grading is good in that it's the only measure of students' speaking abilities, it focuses only on pronunciation and voice and not communicative competence. In my experiences team-teaching OCI, textbook content which is notional-functional is the primary focus, not presentation structure and pronunciation and therefore the grading criteria do not measure what is taught. Also, although the scale has objective guidelines, in practice the grading is subjective as teachers (including myself) grade students in comparison to peers' performance.

*University entrance exams*

As mentioned in section 3.1, these tests are very important to all stakeholders, and results have real implications to students' futures. A standard is set by graduates of the school, and rising or falling scores on the English listening sections can show the schools' effectiveness in listening instruction. However, since listening practice with CDs is done in nearly every English course, and because entrance examination results

come two years after the OCI program, correlation between OCI and exam results is likely to be weak. Additionally, examinations don't have any interviews or spoken tests (Ogasawara 2008:3) and thus don't give a complete picture of student English ability.

## 4.3 Formative evaluation

*English department attitude survey*

The survey is useful in producing the background information necessary for better understanding the OCI classroom. Individual students' time spent every week studying English, scores on standardized tests and other information can be used to explain the results of summative evaluation. Additionally, teachers can take student attitudes and levels of confidence into account when planning lessons. Although more insight might be gained from open-ended questions, the survey nevertheless provides a useful starting point.

*Teacher meetings*

The teachers' meetings are a positive force in that they're regular and frequent, focusing only on OCI. Examining and reflecting on materials, integral to the curriculum, leads to improvements as the course progresses. On the other hand, with such a limited scope, an opportunity to examine OCI as a whole is lost, because this is the only venue teachers have to concentrate on it. O'Donnell's (2005) interviews with Japanese teachers suggest that discussions of methodology between teachers are taboo. I also have experienced in many schools a live and let live policy among teachers regarding methodology, which suggests that without outside pressure or changed beliefs, teachers' meetings will remain a limited evaluative tool.

*Lack of other instruments*

The current formative evaluation framework does not give enough information to determine factors contributing to success or failure (Edwards & Kennedy 1998:120) or to increase the likelihood of successful implementation (Williams & Burden 1994:22). For example, there is no examination by the school of how grammar translation methodology in OCI hinders students' acquisition of oral skills, a problem identified by the literature (see section 2). Additionally, while formative evaluation ideally involves all stakeholders (Rea-Dickins & Germaine 2001:254), only teachers and students participate in the current system.

## 4.4 Accountability evaluation

Generally speaking, the accountability measures are positive in that they give school administrators, parents, and students channels to communicate with teachers. Open classes and observations encourage teachers to reflect upon their methods. The problem lies in the focus. Because the focus is on teacher behavior, teachers view it negatively as embarrassing and as a potential threat (White et al. 1991:22), with little perceived benefit. Furthermore, while student and parent complaints may be course-specific, observations and attitude questionnaires do not place evaluation in the context of OCI.

## 5 Suggestions for changing evaluation procedures

This section will suggest improvements to the evaluation of OCI at the institution level. It will take into account that no system of course evaluation exists and that the suggestions are unlikely to be employed as they would require changes in beliefs in

14

many participants. However, all of the suggestions will be based on the existing evaluation tools at the school in the hope if such evaluation would become desirable, it could be easily to put into place.

## 5.1 Summative evaluation

There is a wealth of summative evaluation at the school, but it does not evaluate all course aspects. This section will discuss changes that would evaluate students' speaking abilities and give a better picture of communicative competence, a stated goal of MEXT's OCI program (Appendix 1).

### 5.1.1 Changing standardized test types

Because the TOEIC Bridge and GTEC Basic tests cover essentially the same areas in the same way, the school would benefit from replacing one of these tests with one that has a spoken interview section. The STEP Eiken test (STEP 2007) would fit this need well, as it has been used in Japan since 1963 and also has government backing: one MEXT document set the Eiken level 2 and pre-level 2 as the goals for high school graduates (MEXT 2003).

The Eiken interview tests covers many content areas. Below is a list of the question types for the pre-level 2 interview test (see appendix 7 for the complete format):

### Second Stage
● An interview in English (approx. 6 min.)

| Skills tested | Format / topic | Format / topic details | # of questions | Question types |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Speaking | Reading aloud | Read a passage of about 50 words. | 1 | Interview with one interviewer (test takers will be judged on content of responses, pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, amount of information given, and whether or not the test taker speaks actively and assertively) |
| | Questions about a passage | Answer questions about the passage in the previous section | 1 | |
| | Questions about an illustration | Describe the actions of a person in a picture | 1 | |
| | Questions about an illustration | Describe the state / situation of a person in a picture. | 1 | |
| | The test taker's opinion | Answer questions about topics written on a card. | 1 | |
| | The test taker's opinion | Answer questions about daily life / routines. | 1 | |
| Common topics / situations | | | | |
| Daily life & routines topics | Previous years' topics | Home theaters, volunteer guides, electronic dictionaries, food product fairs, film festivals, prepaid cards | | |

This test covers both listening and speaking, allowing for evaluation of both targets of OCI, and the government's designation of pre-level 2 as a benchmark sets a clear goal for teachers and students. This could result in 'positive backwash,' as it is an incentive for teachers to focus on speaking skills.

The disadvantages of this test are that the students must pass the first written part of the test before the interview stage, meaning students without adequate reading abilities would not be tested. Additionally, while the first step of the test can be held at the school, the second must take place in a designated test site, creating potential budgetary and legal concerns.

An alternative would be the widely-recognized Cambridge KET and PET tests
(Cambridge ESOL 2008a, 2008b), which require speaking tests of all participants and
can be taken at a school (J. George, personal communication, July 23, 2008). This test is
not widely used in Japan (ibid.), and lacks government backing, but is the easiest option
available.

### 5.1.2 Change the OCI presentation grading system

The course would benefit from an evaluation system of oral communicative abilities not
limited to presentations. Both the FSI Proficiency ratings (Higgs & Clifford 1982, cited
in Tsang & Wong 2002:221-4) and the CEFR guidelines (Council of Europe 2001) are
useful descriptions to base evaluation on. As opposed to the current grading system,
these criteria focus on successful communicative language use. Also, scores have
transferability and recognition in other contexts such as university applications.

The drawback to this approach is the time required to administer and grade tests based
on the criteria, and train teachers in their use. Just as in the current system, there is a risk
of subjectivity in scoring when training and time are insufficient. The time currently
given to written textbook content tests and presentations could instead be devoted to this
purpose. This, I believe, would more successfully asses the course and its students in
terms of the MEXT Course of Study.

## 5.2 Formative evaluation

This section will focus on using already existing systems to gather formative data. In a situation where summative results are poor, formative data can prevent an innovation from being prematurely abandoned by showing why it is failing, and encourage re-design (Kennedy & Edwards 1998:122). Given the resources already devoted to OCI and communicative English, a serious effort at formative evaluation is desirable.

### 5.2.1 Adapting accountability measures

Although feedback questionnaires, observations, and student-teacher talk are used by the school for accountability purposes, the literature describes these methods as good examples of formative evaluation (Kennedy & Edwards 1998:120, Rea-Dickins & Germaine 2001:254). If the focus were changed from teacher behavior to the course itself with improvement in mind, a wealth of qualitative data would be available.

To give some examples, the generic questionnaires could ask questions specific to the course and include open questions about attitudes or perceived progress. Open observations can be conducted so that the opinions of parents be solicited by teachers or administrators, with questions focusing on the course and its perceived effectiveness. Parents may feel "unqualified" in making judgments about questions of methodology, but concerns about relevance of teaching spoken English, textbooks, etc. would have a platform for being voiced. Finally, while casual student-teacher talk no doubt touches upon course issues, it would be more beneficial if teachers actively initiated conversations and sought information from students. These measures, given that they are already in place, would be the simplest way of expanding formative evaluation.

**5.2.2 Teachers' meetings**

The meetings as they are now are valuable but limited, and their expansion would be beneficial to formative evaluation. Unfortunately, the obstacles to discussion of methodology are apparently insurmountable, but I will suggest two helpful but less contentious areas of possible improvement.

First, the discussion of teacher-made materials can be expanded to evaluating the main course texts and the written tests based on them, and how they assist or impede oral English practice. Second, teachers could share their opinions about student progress through the materials and their success or failure in acquiring target language. Focusing on in-class speaking performance gives immediate feedback to teachers allowing them to shape the course, and potentially serves as a counter to poor summative test results. These discussions need not touch directly on methodology to provide information sharing that teachers can use to positively shape their teaching.

**5.3 Administration changes**

School administrators are responsible for implementing MEXT policy, but unfortunately have little involvement in course evaluation. Without a change in teacher beliefs, a systematic approach to OCI evaluation is difficult, but administration involvement could greatly facilitate evaluation. First, administrators need to encourage the idea that evaluation is to judge courses and not teachers, and follow through with observations that are consistent with this belief. Next, while teachers may worry that evaluation will create conflict with colleagues, administrators are in a position to act as

an objective buffer. Finally, only administrators have the power to create time necessary for notoriously busy Japanese teachers to systematically evaluate the course. Clearly a change in administrator beliefs is also essential to the success of encouraging communicative competence as a necessary benchmark for evaluation in our institution and in high school education in Japan.

## 6 Conclusion

This paper has suggested a system of evaluation that comprehensively deals with one innovative language program in high schools, but it must be restated that changes in teacher and administrator beliefs must come before any such system could be implemented. The risk of not encouraging evaluation of this kind for OCI or any other class is that schools' implementations of MEXT mandates will continue to be applied unevenly, MEXT will lack information about success or failure of implementation, and institutions will not change in response to the demands of the environment around them such as business groups calling for increased English speaking skills. The risk is that if the institutions lag too far behind, sudden and revolutionary change that causes great shock to participants may result.

## Appendix 1 – MEXT OCI course description

### 1 Aural/Oral Communication I

1   Objectives

   To develop students' basic abilities to understand and convey information, ideas, etc. by listening to or speaking English, and to foster a positive attitude toward communication through dealing with everyday topics.

2   Contents
（1）Language Activities

   The following communicative activities should be conducted in concrete language-use situations so that students play the role of receivers and senders of information, ideas, etc.

   A   To understand content by listening to English and to respond in a way appropriate to the situation and the purpose.

   B   To ask and answer questions about topics that are of interest to students.

   C   To transmit information, ideas, etc. appropriately in accordance with the situation and the purpose.

   D   To organize and present information obtained by listening or reading, one's own ideas, etc. and to understand what is presented.

（2）Treatment of the Language Activities

   A   Items to be Considered in Instruction

   In order to conduct effectively the communicative activities stated in (1), instruction on the following items should be given when necessary.

   (a)To pronounce English with due attention to the basic characteristics of English sounds such as rhythm and intonation.

   (b)To understand and utilize basic sentence patterns and grammatical items that are required for communicative activities.

   (c)To utilize expressions that are required in asking for repetition and paraphrasing.

   (d)To understand the role of nonverbal means of communication such as gestures and use them effectively in accordance with the situation and the purpose.

   B   Language-use Situations and Functions of Language

   In conducting the language activities stated in (1), language-use situations and functions of language suitable for the attainment of the objectives stated in 1 above should be chosen mainly from among the Examples of Language-use Situations and the Examples of Functions of Language listed after *Writing*

21

(hereafter referred to as Examples of Language-use Situations and Functions of Language), and these chosen examples should be integrated and utilized. In so doing, consideration should be given so that the situations for communication on an individual basis and for communication in groups can be actively provided.

（3）Language Elements

　　A　In carrying out the language activities stated in（1）, language elements suitable for the attainment of the objectives stated in 1 above should, in principle, be chosen from among the Language Elements listed in the Course of Study for Lower Secondary School and the English Language Elements listed after *Writing*（hereafter referred to as Language Elements for Lower and Upper Secondary Schools）. In so doing, consideration should be given to the following.

　　　　(a)The language elements should be contemporary standard English in principle. However, consideration should also be given to the fact that different varieties of English are used throughout the world as means of communication.

　　　　(b)Analyses and explanations of language elements should be minimized. Emphasis should be placed on understanding how language elements are used in actual situations and on utilizing them.

　　B　Words suitable for the achievement of the objectives stated in 1 above should be chosen from within the limits indicated in Contents(3)B of *English* Ⅰ. Basic collocations should be chosen for instruction.

3　Treatment of the Contents

（1)Taking into account the emphasis on developing students' aural/oral communication abilities in lower secondary schools, the basic learning items introduced in lower secondary schools should be reviewed and mastered by conducting communicative activities which cover a wider range of topics and involve a greater variety of partners.

（2)Listening and speaking instruction is conducted more effectively by integrating listening and speaking activities with reading and writing activities.

　　　　　　　　　(retrieved from http://www.mext.go.jp/english/shotou/030301.htm)

**Appendix 2 – Author's summary of interview and correspondence with Teacher A**
<u>**Background information:**</u>

- Teacher A has taught the OCI Course 3 or 4 times since its implementation. He can't remember any significant changes in the curriculum over the years.

- Oral Communication was implemented by the Ministry of Education in response to requests from the Japanese business community.

- Classes are not evaluated individually. The English program is viewed as a whole.

- Evaluation of courses and changes in curriculum at the institution level are done "instinctively" and not based on analysis or research.

<u>**Summative evaluation:**</u>

- Students take the TOIEC Bridge test every April and the GTEC basic test every June to measure their English abilities. They are tested in reading, writing, and listening.

- To be admitted to the high school, students must pass an entrance examination. The examination is developed by the prefectural Board of Education and is used by many schools. The test has an English section that tests listening and reading.

- In Oral Communication I, students give two presentations over the course of a year. These presentations are graded based on voice/pronunciation and eye contact (see Appendix 4), as well as content and preparedness.

<u>**Formative evaluation:**</u>

- Once a year, students are asked to complete a questionnaire about English (see Appendix 5). This data is used by the school's English department.

- Teachers of the course have meetings once a week or once every two weeks depending on the teachers to talk about Oral Communication I. The meetings are

mainly concerned with how far teachers have progressed through the textbook. Teacher-made worksheets and other materials are also discussed. They give one another ideas about how to improve these materials. This is a typical style of class meeting, but if a "charismatic" teacher assumes leadership the other teachers will have less input.

**<u>Accountability issues:</u>**

- Sometimes students give feedback directly to teachers after class or in the teacher's office, but only if they are confident enough to approach the teacher.

- Students who aren't confident enough, but have a serious complaint to make about a class can tell their parents, who can call the school with the complaint. The school administrators take the complaint, and then inform the teacher of what was said.

- Twice a year, students are asked to complete a questionnaire about every class that they take (Appendix 6). Teachers are free to implement suggestions from the students, but are not required to do so. Data from the questionnaires is recorded and reported to school administrators and the prefectural Board of Education, and also reported in a newsletter to students' parents.

- Once a year the school has an "open school" where anyone including parents and other schools' teachers can come and observe whatever lessons they'd like.

- Once a year the school is opened to junior high school students who are interested in attending the high school and their parents.

- School administrators observe lessons irregularly. The purpose is to evaluate the performance of teachers. The administrators have a checklist of issues to observe, and these are mainly concerned with student behavior in class, but also the teacher's style of teaching. The administrators share their comments after the lesson.

## **Appendix 3 – Summary of interview with Teacher B**

- Oral Communication I was mandatory in every school for first year high school students. About 5 years ago it was made optional – each school could decide whether or not to require it for their own students or to make it an optional elective. Complaints from English teachers at the local level caused the Ministry of Education to reverse their decision.

- The reasons for the change were not made public by the Ministry, because it would be an admission of failure on their part.

- Possible reasons for local English teacher resistance could be the idea that teaching grammar is more important than communicative competence, or that communicative competence is not necessary at all, or resistance on the part of Japanese teachers to team-teaching with foreign ALTs, which OCI requires.

(NOTE: Teacher B is not a teacher at the school examined in this paper. He teaches at another high school of similar academic level in the same prefecture, and thus the background he gives is relevant.)

# Appendix 4 – School criteria for grading student speaking ability

## Speaking evaluation criteria

| Area of assessment | Score | Description | Items for consideration |
|---|---|---|---|
| Voice / pronunciation | A | • Voice loud enough to be understood by listeners.<br>• Overall, speaks with accurate pronunciation.<br>• Student is conscious of stress and rhythm. | • "Loud enough voice" means loud enough for everyone in the classroom to hear.<br>• Whole-word pronunciation and pronunciation across words will be graded, not just that of individual sounds.<br>• "Not natural" pronunciation is for example: adding vowel sounds to the ends of words, English specific sounds such as "th" or final "r" sounds, accent, and pauses in places other than the end of sentences.<br>• Stress and rhythm: Strong and weak stress, rising and falling tones, and rhythm, as opposed to flat speaking. |
| | B | • Voice loud enough to be understood by listeners.<br>• Overall, speaks with accurate pronunciation.<br>• Student is not conscious of stress of rhythm. | |
| | C | • Voice not loud enough to be understood by listeners.<br>• Pronunciation, stress and rhythm are not natural. | |
| Eye contact | A | • Assertively tries to make him/herself understood. (He/she looks at all audience members left, right, and center.) | • For all school years, students must memorize their manuscripts and not read from them while doing their presentations. A note card with key words, however, is allowed. |
| | B | • Tries to make him/herself understood. (He/she looks straight ahead and mostly keeps his/her head up.) | |
| | C | • The student does not try to make him/herself understood. (He/she looks up, down, or to the side for long periods of time.) | |

| Interaction | A | • In response to questions, the student is able to give appropriate answers and reasons.<br><br>• The student speaks smoothly in general without unnatural pauses or silence. | • Students will be asked one question about presentation contents, and give an answer.<br><br>• The questions will be ones that ask the students to "express themselves" (their thoughts, opinions, feelings, etc.). |
|---|---|---|---|
| | B | • The student is able to give answers to questions.<br><br>• The student speaks smoothly in general without unnatural pauses or silence. | • In order to keep the question level fair to all students, questions will be prepared in advance by teachers.<br><br>• "Appropriate answers" are defined as: For 1st year students, individual words strung together. For 2nd year students, a whole sentence. For 3rd year students, 2-3 full sentences. |
| | C | • The student can't answer questions.<br><br>• Communication is impeded by long pauses and silence. | • "Giving reasons" is defined as: Not simply repeating what was said before, but original, logical, and consistent answers. |

(Translated by author from an internal school document)

(NOTE: This is a description of only the areas of spoken English that are assessed by the school. The full description includes written English as well.)

**Appendix 5 - Survey of students' attitudes toward English**

# A survey about your English studies
*Circle the number of your choice below.

Q1. Do you like English?
  1.  I like it.
  2.  I like it a little.
  3.  I don't like it much.
  4.  I don't like it at all.

Q2. What particular areas of English do you want to improve? (Circle 1-3 answers)
  1.  Speaking
  2.  Listening
  3.  Reading
  4.  Writing
  5.  Fundamental grammar
  6.  Fundamental vocabulary

Q3. Which areas do you feel you are weak in? (Circle 1-3 answers)
  1.  Speaking
  2.  Listening
  3.  Reading
  4.  Writing
  5.  Fundamental grammar
  6.  Fundamental vocabulary

Q4. On average, how many hours do you study English outside of school in a week?
(Includes cram schools, prep schools, and conversation schools)
  1.  Less than 2 hours
  2.  2-4 hours
  3.  4-6 hours
  4.  6-8 hours
  5.  Over 8 hours

Q5. Have you taken part in an exchange program with one of our sister schools? Please circle the programs you've participated in, and write how many times you've participated. (First year students – please write which programs you'd like to participate in.)

I have participated: (2$^{nd}$-3$^{rd}$ year students only)
1. American sister school exchange program                (        times)
2. German sister school exchange program                (        times)
3. US Army base American high school exchange        (        times)
4. New Zealand sister school exchange                        (        times)

I would like to participate in: (All students)
1. American sister school exchange program
2. German sister school exchange program
3. US Army base American high school exchange
4. New Zealand sister school exchange

Q6. Do you have an Eiken test or United Nations Associations Test of English certification, a TOEIC score, or scores from another such English test?
1. I have a level _____ Eiken certification.
2. I have a level _____ United Nations Associations Test of English certification.
3. I have _____ points on the _____ test.

Q7. Have you spent one or more years living in an English-speaking country? If so, please write the country's name and length of stay below.
    I lived in _____ for _____ years and _____
    months.
    (from the age of      to        )

(Translated by author from an internal school document)

## Appendix 6 – General Student Feedback Questionnaire

# Class questionnaire for the 20xx academic year

| Class name | Teacher's name | Student info | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Year | Class | Number | Name: |

This survey is to improve students' learning experience by gathering information about the class from a student's perspective. We do this by asking students to reflect on their classroom involvement and opinions and thoughts about the class.

✧ Please reflect on your involvement in this class. Put a circle in the most appropriate box. If unable to answer, leave the box blank.

| | Question | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | Comments |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | I participate actively in class. | | | | | |
| 2 | I turn in all homework/assignments. | | | | | |
| 3 | I prepare for and review class content. | | | | | |
| 4 = strongly applies   3 = somewhat applies   2 = doesn't really apply   1 = doesn't apply at all | | | | | | |

✧ Please evaluate the class in terms of the criteria below. Put a circle in the most appropriate box. If unable to answer, leave the box blank.

| 4 = strongly applies   3 = somewhat applies   2 = doesn't really apply   1 = doesn't apply at all | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Question | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | Comments |
| 1 | The teacher uses materials and explains creatively | | | | | |
| 2 | The point of the lessons are easy to grasp | | | | | |
| 3 | I feel motivated to learn in class | | | | | |
| 4 | The pace of the class is just right | | | | | If 2 or 1, too fast or slow? |
| 5 | Students are active, not only being lectured | | | | | |
| 6 | Explanations are easy to understand | | | | | |
| 7 | Teacher-made materials are helpful | | | | | |
| 8 | The teacher's speaking speed is just right | | | | | If 2 or 1, too fast or slow? |
| 9 | The teacher speaks respectfully to students | | | | | |

(Translated by author from an internal school document)

## Appendix 7 – Eiken STEP Test pre-level 2 format

### First Stage
- Written test (65 min.)
- Listening (approx. 25 min.)

| Skills tested | Format / topic | Format / topic details | # of questions | Question types | Answering method |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Vocabulary | Fill in blanks | Fill in blanks in sentences with appropriate words. | 20 | Short sentences, dialogs | Multiple choice (from 4 possible answers) |
| Reading | Fill in blanks | Fill in blanks in a dialog with words or phrases | 8 | Explanations, descriptions, opinion piececs, etc. | |
| | Fill in blanks | Fill in blanks in a passage with words | 5 | Stories, explanations, descriptions | |
| | Comprehension questions | Answer questions about the content of a passage. | 7 | E-mail, explanations, descriptions | |
| Writing | Putting sentences in order | Arrange the words in one sentence of a passage or dialog into correct order. | 5 | Short sentences, dialogs | Number selecting based on instructions |
| Listening | Dialog question and answer | After listening to part of a dialog, choose the phrase that should come next. | 10 | Conversation dialogs | Multiple choice (from 3 possible answers) |
| | Dialog comprehension questions | Answer questions about the content of a dialog. | 10 | | Multiple choice (from 4 possible answers) |

| | Listening comprehension questions | Answer questions about the contents of a passage read orally. | 10 | Stories, explanations, descriptions | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Common topics / situations | | | | |
| Places / situations | Home, school, workplace, town (stores, public facilities, etc.), phone, announcements | | | | |
| Topics | School, hobbies / interests, travel, shopping, sports, movies, music, food, weather, street directions, foreign culture, biographical info, history, education, science, nature, environment, etc. | | | | |

## Second Stage

● An interview in English (approx. 6 min.)

| Skills tested | Format / topic | Format / topic details | # of questions | Question types |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Speaking | Reading aloud | Read a passage of about 50 words. | 1 | Interview with one interviewer (test takers will be judged on content of responses, pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, amount of information given, and whether or not the test taker speaks actively and assertively) |
| | Questions about a passage | Answer questions about the passage in the previous section | 1 | |
| | Questions about an illustration | Describe the actions of a person in a picture | 1 | |
| | Questions about an illustration | Describe the state / situation of a person in a picture. | 1 | |
| | The test taker's opinion | Answer questions about topics written on a card. | 1 | |
| | The test taker's opinion | Answer questions about daily life / routines. | 1 | |
| Common topics / situations | | | | |
| Daily life & routines topics | Previous years' topics | Home theaters, volunteer guides, electronic dictionaries, food product fairs, film festivals, prepaid cards | | |

(Translated by author from STEP website:

http://www.eiken.or.jp/exam/grade_p2/contents.html)

# REFERENCES

**Benesse Corp.** (2008) *GTEC for STUDENTS: 検定公開会場受検のご案内*. Retrieved June 14, 2008 from: http://gtec.for-students.jp/kaijo/index.html

**Browne, C. and Wada, M.** (1998) 'Current Issues in High School English Teaching in Japan: An Exploratory Survey' In *Language, Culture, and Curriculum*. Available: http://www.multilingual-matters.net/lcc/011/0097/lcc0110097.pdf

**Carless, D.** (2001) 'Curriculum implementation in Hong Kong.' In Hall and Hewings (eds.) *Innovation in English Language Teaching*. Routledge.

**Council of Europe** (2001) *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Online. Available: http://www.coe.int/T/DG4/Portfolio/documents/Framework_EN.pdf

**Educational Testing Service (ETS)** (2008) *TOEIC Bridge™ Overview*. Retrieved June 14, 2008 from: http://www.ets.org/portal/site/ets/menuitem.1488512ecfd5b8849a77b13bc3921509/?vgnextoid=e5452d3631df4010VgnVCM10000022f95190RCRD&vgnextchannel=c8a37f95494f4010VgnVCM10000022f95190RCRD

**Fujimoto-Adamson, N.** (2006) 'Globalization and History of English Education in Japan.' *Asian EFL Journal*. 8/3. Available: http://www.asian-efl-journal.com/Sept_06_nfa.php

**Gorsuch, G.** (2001) 'Japanese EFL Teachers' Perceptions of Communicative, Audiolingual and Yakudoku Activities: The Plan Versus the Reality.' *EDUCATION POLICY ANALYSIS ARCHIVES* 9/10. Online. Available: http://epaa.asu.edu/epaa/v9n10.html

**Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (MEXT)** (2002) *Handbook for Team-Teaching: Revised Edition*. Japan.

**------------** (2003) 'Regarding the Establishment of an Action Plan to Cultivate "Japanese with English Abilities"' Online. Available: http://www.mext.go.jp/english/topics/03072801.htm

**Kennedy, C. and Edwards, C.** (1998) *ELT Management*. University of Birmingham:CELS.

**Murphey, T.** (2006, February 7) 'Practical reasons for praising entrance exams.' *The Japan Times*. Online. Available: http://search.japantimes.co.jp/cgi-bin/ek20060207a1.html

**O'Donnell, K.** (2005) 'Japanese Secondary English Teachers: Negotiation of Educational Roles in the Face of Curricular Reform.' *Language, Culture, and Curriculum.* 18/3: 300-315.

**Ogasawara, M.** (2008) 'Classroom Analysis of an Oral Communication Class at a Japanese High School.' *Asian EFL Journal*. Online. Available: http://www.asian-efl-journal.com/pta_Jan_08.pdf

**Porcaro, J.** (2006) 'SELHi Progress, Problems and Prescriptions.' *Explorations in Teacher Education: JALT Teacher Education SIG Newsletter:* 14/1: 5-12.

**Rea-Dickins, P. and Germaine, K.** (2001) 'Purposes for Evaluation.' In Hall and Hewings (eds.) *Innovation in English Language Teaching.* Routledge.

**Reesor, M.** (2003) 'Japanese attitudes to English: Towards and explanation of poor performance.' *NUCB JLCC* 5/2: 57-65.

**The Society for Testing English Proficiency (STEP)** (2007) *STEP 英検 – 日本英語検定協会 -| 英検とは.* Retrieved June 21, 2008 from: http://www.eiken.or.jp/about/index.html

**Taguchi, N.** (2002) 'Implementing Oral Communication Classes in Upper Secondary Schools: A Case Study.' *The Language Teacher*. Online. Available: http://www.jalt-publications.org/tlt/articles/2002/12/taguchi

**Tsang, W. T. and Wong, M.** 'Conversational English: An Interactive, Collaborative, and Reflective Approach.' In Richards and Renandya (2002) (ed.) *Methodology in Language Teaching.* Cambridge University Press.

**University of Cambridge ESOL Examinations (Cambridge ESOL)** (2008a) *Cambridge ESOL: Key English Test (KET)*. Retrieved July 8, 2008 from: http://www.cambridgeesol.org/exams/general-english/ket.html

------------ (2008b) *Cambridge ESOL: Preliminary English Test (PET)*. Retrieved July 8, 2008 from: http://www.cambridgeesol.org/exams/general-english/pet.html

**White, R.** (1988) *The ELT Curriculum.* Oxford: Blackwell.

**White, R., Martin, M., Stimson, M. and Hodge, R.** (1991) *Management in ELT.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

**Williams, M. and Burden, R.** (1994) 'The role of evaluation in ELT project design.' *ELT Journal* 48/1:22-27.