

# TEACHING AS COMMUNICATION : AN EMPIRICAL APPROACH TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF AN ENGLISH TEACHING METHODOLOGY FOR NON-ENGLISH MAJOR STUDENTS AT A JAPANESE UNIVERSITY.

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## ABSTRACT

The literature on teaching English as a foreign or second language, is predicated on students' desire to study. Such assumptions are, however, inadequate for seeking "solutions" to education problems endemic at Japanese universities. Thus while teachers are obliged to keep abreast of theoretical developments in pedagogy, they are forced by the contingencies of classroom reality to resort to empirical methods for devising curricula to meet the specific needs of Japanese students.

Drawing on theoretical lines and empirical examples from the fields of film and literature, as well as from traditional EFL/ESL literature, and incorporating insights from psychology and cultural studies, it will be argued that an alternative direction for language teaching has become necessary, one that requires a firm philosophical foundation with the radical aim of fostering individuality and maturity in students by means of a motivating subject-centered pedagogy that pays more attention to their intellectual and emotional needs and to the development of an ethical and aesthetic sensibility than does the grammar-translation approach which up to the present, despite the lip service paid to "communicative" English, has been the predominant model at Japanese universities.

The thesis leads to the conclusion that English study as communication may be best served by a subject-centered approach that promotes an intellectually higher level of student self-expression through writing (and discussion) rather than overemphasizing the development of student competence in the spoken language which the literature appears to indicate has produced intellectually meagre results.

Note : this paper is the preliminary section of an MA thesis in Communication awarded in July 1998 by Greenwich University, Hilo, Hawaii, USA.

## INTRODUCTION

### CHAPTER I

This introduction will throw into relief the special conditions at Japanese universities and in Japanese society which underly the education crisis so that the three following sections, *Language as Communication*, *Reading as Communication* and *Film as Communication* which represent an attempt to describe the problematics involved in the respective communicative fields and to propose tentative, empirical measures to meet the pedagogical demands of each discipline, may be better understood as arguments for the viability of an empirical, pedagogical approach to linguistic communication within the restrictive parameters imposed by the social, political and institutional pressures of Japanese society.

### CHAPTER II

Japanese universities force all students to study a foreign language for two years, a system unpopular with many students who respond with desultory attendance and perfunctory study. The lack of positive results have, after four decades, finally moved the Ministry of Education (Monbusho) to order public universities to reorganize both curricula and the faculty structure itself. However, there can be no great expectations of success, since the coercive element will only be slightly softened by allowing students more choice in the form of elective courses while the burden of excessive course credit requirements will be only marginally reduced (Nunn, 1996) ; in the end institutional reform may prove to be no more than old wine in new bottles for the following reasons:

- 1) the excessive course load will continue to encourage superficial study.
- 2) student hobby circles, recreational activities and jobbing reduce study time.
- 3) poor linguistic skills and language training, and outmoded pedagogical methods.
- 4) the low esteem of classroom teaching among professors.

The Japanese university system allows students four years to recover from the rigors of "examination hell" in highschool. During their university years students' energies are claimed by a delayed maturation and socialization process rather than by intellectual development or academic achievement, and it has always been accepted that students can graduate with the minimum of effort (see Wadden, 1993 : 126-134).

The roots of the problem lie in the way English is taught in junior and senior highschools as an examination subject for higher education. Students will have had little experience in listening and speaking when they enter university. Although Monbusho

ordered the introduction of oral English to begin in April 1994, the language skills of most teachers are so inadequate, and the hours of instruction insufficient that it will take several years before there is any noticeable improvement in college freshmen's ability to speak English. Meanwhile, university teachers must continue teaching students with an aversion to English study, and unable to communicate in spoken English.

University English instruction is often just a continuation of their highschool regimen of rote memorization, mindless drilling, and translating boring texts ; since serious study is not required, English education in any meaningful sense is thus rendered nugatory. This being said, it may be claimed that, since English education at the pre-college level is for the purpose of selecting students for higher education, it simply serves the *raison d'être* of the Japanese education system which is, in the words of Thomas Rohlen, for :

...shaping generations of disciplined workers for a techno-meritocratic system that requires highly socialized individuals capable of performing reliably in a rigorous hierarchical and finely tuned organizational environment (Rohlen, 1983 : 209).

From the point of view of government bureaucrats this instrumentalization of education may seem rational, but Monbusho's belated recognition of the system's failure to produce graduates who can communicate in English (as the recent introduction of oral language instruction shows) suggests that, even on its own terms, the system is not working well. At the same time, an instrumental approach to language teaching poses a dilemma for educators in the classroom faced with their charges. In the words of Richard Shaull in his forward to *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* :

There is no such thing as a neutral education process. Education either functions as an instrument which is used to facilitate the integration of the younger into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity to it or it becomes the "practice of freedom" the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world (Paulo Freire, 1985 : 13).

Thus the problems of English education are not unrelated to problems of education in general; the failure of instrumentalized English education to produce practical language skills may be linked to the lack of a broader, philosophical approach to education that could help Japanese with their difficulty in thinking critically, and communicating with people from outside Japan, an egregious failing deriving from their insular mindset and chronic psychological isolation from Asia, not to mention the rest of the world. It would be short-sighted to consider the problem of English education in Japan as merely that of upgrading language skills ; also required is a commitment to teaching about foreign cultures, an ignorance of which hampers Japanese attempts to communicate with the outside world. The latter problem has, indeed, been belatedly recognized by the Central

Council for Education, an advisory panel to Monbusho, which recommended in July 1996 that English not be taught as an independent subject in primary schools, but as part of a global education project with the aim of raising "internationally minded" students (*The Daily Yomiuri*, March 13, 1997).

The Japanese education system has found not a few admirers and apologists abroad, especially in the USA among conservative economists and critics (Feinberg, 1993). However, in Japan itself there is a chorus of negative criticism from teachers, students, parents and pundits in the press. The headlines below selected from the English language press illustrate the wide range of problems plaguing the system.

"Japanese universities contemplate reform : academic institutions feel increasingly limited by a highly rigid structure" (*The Japan Times*, March 16, 1988).

"Japan's totalitarian education" (*The Japan Times*, Nov. 8, 1992).

"'Exam hell' at odds with lifelong learning" (*The Mainichi Daily News*, Feb.29, 1993).

"The battle between practical English, exam English continues" (*The Daily Yomiuri*, Dec.17, 1992).

"Learning 'just the facts' no way to study languages" (*The Daily Yomiuri*, April 11, 1991).

"Prof's poll shows students don't study" (*The Mainichi Daily News*, Aug.4, 1993).

"Japan students exhibit apathy in global survey" (*The Daily Yomiuri*, Dec.3, 1992).

"WE REAP WHAT WE SOW : Japanese system produces a generation unschooled in reality" (*The Asahi Evening News*, Feb.26, 1993).

"Expert wants stress on communicative skills" (*The Daily Yomiuri*, April 16, 1992).

"Education must strive to nurture the individual" (*The Daily Yomiuri*, Jan. 21, 1993).

"Obstacles to implementing communicative approach beyond teacher's control" (*The Daily Yomiuri*, August 9, 1993).

The last headline refers to the macrofactors governing the education system and setting the parameters within which teachers must work. Hence the starting point for curriculum reform and innovations in pedagogy must begin with a realistic assessment of the limits imposed by the social and cultural milieu of Japan, the institutional character of the Japanese university, government policies which determine the education budget and funding allocation, the number of schools and the quality of the facilities, the number of students and teachers (crucially the student/teacher ratio), curriculum and examination policy, and the ideological control in the training and employment of teachers. No other "modern" state exerts so much influence over education, even going as far as controlling and censoring school textbooks (Field, 1995).

Van Wolferen (1989) has drawn attention to the political arrangements that help to shape the ideological contours of Japanese society. He precisely locates the deeply-rooted weaknesses of the Japanese (Asian) approach to learning that resist reform :

Far from sharpening the reasoning ability of its charges, the Japanese education system, on the whole, is hostile to such a purpose. Spontaneous reasoning, along with spontaneous behavior is systematically suppressed in practically all schools ; there is no patience with originality. Pupils are not taught to think logically, or to ask the right questions - indeed to ask any questions at all. Instead, the emphasis is on rote memorization. Japanese students who have 'done well' carry vast masses of facts around with them in their heads; if they have been able to connect these facts and work them into a coherent view of life, they have had to do so entirely on their own (83).

### CHAPTER III

Schoppa (1991) in a study of education politics concludes that government reforms have so far failed because of such factors as an absence of consensus, the impact of single party dominance (LDP), and the factionalism in the bureaucracy which makes a recalcitrant Education Ministry impervious to outside pressure, either in the form of cabinet level interference or weakly organized public opinion. He quotes a retired senior bureaucrat Amaya Naohiro who succinctly explains :

Major reform takes place in Japan only when there is strong pressure from the outside. The inside has virtually no initiative. With economics, Japan has been fairly successful since the outside is so strong that it can force reform. But with education there simply is not an outside (254).

Hence teachers should not wait for changes to come from the outside, but must act on their own to introduce reforms by adopting "subversive" classroom strategies.

The influence of pre-university schooling in the formation of study habits and student attitudes has been shown to be considerable (Shields, 1989) ; consequently, university reforms will be ineffective as long as primary and secondary level schooling continues to negatively influence learning methods. Mochizuki finds students must suppress their real interests to study the three 'core' subjects, one of which is English :

As a result, the students ... come to view their teachers purely as people whose job it is to evaluate them - to give out marks - and not as people who can help them grow and fulfill themselves. Inevitably this damages the relationship between students and teachers (Shields : 140- 1 ).

The damage to intellectual inquiry caused by the suppression of personal interests in their single-minded pursuit of a university place cannot be overestimated; the lack of direction and intellectual lethargy among students poses the greatest challenge to any teacher attempting to restore meaning and purpose to Japanese university education.

Horio (1988) traces the development of the education system from the Meiji period to the present, showing how the state took control of nearly every aspect of education, even to the extent of undermining the democratic principles and ideals it professes to uphold, making the free intellectual and spiritual growth of the individual difficult. He stresses the importance of the teacher's role in converting cultural and moral values into educational values for the intellectual and moral development of the young. He writes :

To guarantee that children have the opportunity *to become the masters of the spiritual liberties required to substantiate a democratic form of social life, they must be nourished through a creative form of educational practice itself supported by free inquiries that will directly lead to meaningful encounters with truth and reality* (240 ; my emphasis).

That Horio's words are not just the inflated rhetoric of an iconoclast has been illustrated by the outbreak of antisocial acts of violence perpetrated by the *Aum Shinrikyo* cult in 1995 involving highly educated doctors and scientists, graduates of some of Japan's elite universities, and two bizarre murders in 1997 involving a 14-year-old school boy with a grudge against the school system. These unprecedented incidents sent shockwaves through Japan and have prompted many commentators to look for blame in the coercive and regimented character of the education system where grades based on memorization are the sole criterion for promotion to higher education.

Concepts of "truth", "reality", ethical and moral values that the humanities, especially literature (Falk, 1989), can foster, have been overlooked in the exam-driven pursuit of grades, awarded to students with a capacity for memorizing and reproducing masses of "facts". Stephens (1991 : 159-60) characterizes this passive style of learning as "excessive compulsion toward acquiring knowledge, with a quantitative attitude towards everything." ; as a result Japanese graduate "unable to see or set goals in their lives." Thus it is no coincidence that the religious cult which attracted the educated elite, as well as thousands of other members from the flotsam and jetsam of Japan's "*gakurekishakai*" (a society where social standing is determined by academic qualifications), should call itself the "Aum Church of Truth". The appeal of such a name and its syncretistic ideology promising empowerment, and salvation proved irresistible to alienated youths searching for "ikigai" (a meaningful life) amid the crass materialism and rampant consumerism of contemporary Japan. Society's disregard for spiritual values and intellectual inquiry has produced young generations spiritually and intellectually confused; students overloaded with trivial facts and information, and stunted by the exigencies of the exam system, show little skill in analyzing, interpreting, and are weak in logical thinking, rational argument, and self-expression.

Nishizawa Junichi, former president of Tohoku University, finds a disturbing connection between the type of education the Aum cadres received and their subsequent thinking and behavior, and points to the root of the evil :

Very few young people leave the system with their spirits unbroken. The process of preparing for university entrance examinations in this country is so arduous that an indelible stamp is inevitably left on the innermost character of the exam taker. Students are so powerfully influenced by this system that the resulting damage is almost impossible to put right (*Japan Times*, May 23, 1995).

Nishizawa adds that the cure is "clear and straightforward." He expects "the engaged educator to give proper direction to the sense of justice that preoccupies young minds" and concludes that, "There must be a balance in the classroom in favor of education of the whole man and woman." Clearly English teachers must also do their share to broaden their pedagogical approach to include ethical and intellectual issues necessary for the spiritual development of Japanese youth. Professor Uesugi Takamichi says what many Japanese intellectuals know but are loathe to admit :

Now we have been economically successful, but most Japanese do not see Japan as a top nation despite such achievements. Above all we are not a top nation in cultural terms. (...) We cannot enjoy leisure to develop our mind and spirit. There is no spiritual life to sustain the individual. The Japanese are not yet living a free life. Some of our institutions have been disappointing, for example, Japanese universities have been rather limited in their influence compared to Western universities (Stephens, 1991 : 39)

#### CHAPTER IV

It is clear from the above remarks that the teachers can no longer seek refuge from the complexities of Japanese society in the safety of ivory tower specialization; not only would it be morally indefensible, but also from an educational standpoint untenable since students will not follow teachers if they are lead away from knowledge relevant to their self-realization ; eager for self-empowerment to survive in a competitive society, and at the same time satisfy their spiritual hunger and intellectual curiosity, they have no time to waste on obscure academic excursions. Hence the frequently observed pervasive absenteeism and napping of students during classes.

Severe intergenerational communication problems can be observed between teachers and students whose roots lie in Japanese history, characterized in the last hundred and thirty years by a series of violent social changes, starting with the forcible opening of the country to the outside, rapid industrialization, imperialistic expansion culminating in defeat, and followed by revolutionary changes during the fifty-year Cold War : the imposition of democratic ideals, the weakening of feudalistic social relations and institutions, and the rapid development of a consumer society. The price of all this success has been high : the ever widening gap between the governing and the governed has produced deeper generational rifts than can be observed in most other advanced countries. With so

much control over education, blame for the deficiencies of the system and student alienation must be laid at the feet of the authorities (see Amano, 1990).

Central to the government-led debate on university reform of the curriculum that has been preoccupying English departments for the past three years is the priority of improving the status of teaching with the aim of enhancing the ability of Japanese students to communicate using the spoken language.

“Communication” has become the buzzword of educational reform together with “*kokusaika*” (internationalization), a vague, untranslatable word seeming to imply the necessity for the Japanese to open up the country to foreign trade and allow foreigners more employment opportunities; the word also presupposes a concomitant change in the mindset of the Japanese from their *shimagunikonjoh* (insular mentality) towards a more open, even cosmopolitan, way of thinking, all of which is predicated on more effective communication with foreigners. Neustupny (1982) has described Japan’s history of communication with the outside through the development of foreign language teaching, constructing a historical paradigm to show three phases of development :

- 1 ) grammar-translation method (stress on the printed word).
- 2 ) audio-lingual method (spoken English texts).
- 3 ) post-audiolingual method (cognitive thinking, verbal communication, information exchange).

The first phase lasted from the Meiji era to the 1950’s when the Japanese were preoccupied with the printed word, translating and gathering information. Few Japanese during this period had much direct contact or communication with foreigners, especially before 1945. The audio-lingual phase is located from the early 60’s to the end of the 70’s when Japanese had extensive contact with Western science, technology and trade but personal contact with foreigners was still rare. Now we are in the post-audiolingual age when personal contacts between Japanese and foreigners have increased dramatically in tandem with Japan’s economic prosperity. No longer confined to the language lab, many Japanese now have the chance to communicate with the sizeable foreign community, or with foreigners when working or studying abroad.

At this stage in Japan’s economic and social development new demands are being made on the education system and on the teaching of foreign languages under the rubric of “internationalization”. Although the Ministry of Education has ordered the introduction of ‘communicative’ oral English for highschoools (April, 1994), emphasis on drilling and rote memorization for the university entrance exam continues more or less unchanged, while reductions in the number of hours of English instruction have only aggravated the contradictions that continue to vitiate the “reforms” (Nunn, 1996).

Further, owing to the influence of political macrofactors, the chances for the successful implementation of reforms appear remote ie., the impetus for change being driven by economic considerations (Horio, 1988 : 374). In the light of planned budget cuts it would seem that Stephens (1991 : 166), although asserting that “Economic and social changes are

the reason for the change in educational style," may be too optimistic when he concludes "and this means a less instrumental approach to education".

Reforms are threatened by the macrofactor impinging most on the classroom performance of the teacher : the number of students per class. Oversized classes are the norm, and as Yamazumi points out (McCormack / Sugimoto, 1986 : 113), proposals for reform have never addressed this crucial issue since it means hiring more teachers ; needless to say, smaller classes would be a prerequisite for abolishing uniformity in education so as to truly respect the individuality of students. The situation in the universities is hardly better, with classes ranging from 10 to 100 students.

Furthermore, although Monbusho will abolish the faculties of Liberal Arts and Humanities, the coercive aspect of English study will remain leaving unsolved the problem of unmotivated students. Hence the urgent need to find ways to motivate students through a communicative approach, as recommended by the Ministry.

However, Monbusho's 1992 proposal to introduce "communicative" English ignores the fact that the problem does not begin at university (Steinberg, 1985 ; Feiler, 1991). Pre-university schooling where the study of English based on exam-oriented grammar-translation methods is a wholly inadequate preparation for the humanistic study of English as a means of communication. In belated recognition of this problem Monbusho is considering a major shift to focus on spoken English for 2003 (*Asahi Evening News*, July 28, 1997).

The foreign teacher wishing to introduce a communicative approach must first be cognizant of the system's peculiarities in order to devise appropriate strategies for students whose attitudes and behavior have been moulded by Japanese society ; an understanding of formative social, historical and political forces at work within the Japanese social system affecting communication inside the second language classroom are equally indispensable for making sense of what happens communicatively between teacher and students, and for anticipating the direction and feasibility of future classroom negotiations. Johnson (1995 : 141) concludes that :

What goes on inside second language classrooms may be influenced more by larger societal forces imposed upon classrooms than by the interactions that take place between teachers and students within those classrooms.

However, despite her conclusion, there is room for a pedagogy of resistance, to counteract the negative forces working against effective classroom communication.

James Shields Jr. recognized the serious problem of oversized classes but bluntly added that "there are other obstacles to overcome - many of which the teachers have little control over", and he concluded that, "teachers will make little headway in converting to a more communicative approach to the teaching of English, unless the philosophy of education in Japan is changed as well" (Mochizuki, 1989 : 140- 1 /144).

## CHAPTER V

Foreign teachers enjoying academic freedom must therefore develop a philosophy of education as the keystone of a communicative pedagogy. The philosophy of education is given scant attention by education theorists, especially in Japan, where, teachers are expected to serve as functionaries of the Monbusho, managing classrooms and administering the national curriculum. At the universities teachers are preoccupied with research, teaching often being considered a chore.

The proposed reforms stress the importance of classroom pedagogy in order to win the support of students frustrated by the lack of choice in a curriculum often irrelevant to their needs. Uninspired teaching adds to their discontent though this cannot be entirely blamed on teachers, given the cavalier attitudes of Japanese students to study.

Under pressure to reform, more teachers are becoming aware of the need for self-reflection. Conventional attitudes to lesson content and teaching methods are now being questioned. Thus a philosophy of education is needed by all teachers displaying conscience and good faith towards their charges ; without a firm philosophical foundation the educator can easily slip into a routine confirming Nietzsche's observation that "a profession makes one thoughtless" (1994, *Human, All Too Human* : 537), or speaking of the teaching profession itself, "...it is the grind of daily practice that leads to it becoming increasingly more routinized and less reflective" (Smyth : 4).

The urgency of the task of formulating a philosophy of education is underscored by the alarming remarks of Amano Ikuo, Professor of Education at Tokyo University : "the very meaning of 'to think' is not well understood in our culture. To us it means something like 'to find an answer which can shared by others'" (Joseph, 1993 : 229).

Since education is a transformative experience, a philosophy (of education) is best understood in the sense urged by Marx, that is, seeking not merely to interpret but to change the world ; education should not merely teach about the world but help to transform it, a position advocated by Fairclough (1992) as "Critical Language Awareness" ; the "ideal" teacher should be able to help students to change themselves by stimulating their emotional as well as intellectual development.

Dissatisfaction with self and the urge for self-transformation is a part of the psychological make-up of all adolescents. Identity formation and integration into the community are urgent tasks for all young people so it is precisely at this stage in life that education matters most. Rohlen, writing on the Japanese conception of adulthood, is of the opinion that, "the Japanese quest for character improvement is close to being a national religion" (Erikson [ed.], 1978). Thus only a philosophy of education that incorporates a transformative praxis can meet students' intellectual and emotional needs.

Education as a human socialization process requires an interdisciplinary approach to prepare students for today's complex, multicultural world. Even a conservative society like Japan is not immune to intellectual trends from abroad. A philosophy of education must be able to accommodate innovation, taking advantage of new opportunities offered

by the cultural cornucopia of today's world so that academia can satisfy aspirations for a future world order more worthy of human dignity than the one we inhabit at present.

This essentially democratic conception of education is found in the writings of John Dewey ; in his treatise on the philosophy of education *Democracy and Education* (1966) he defines education as a 'continuous reconstruction of experience' (322) and philosophy as 'the theory of education as a deliberately constructed practice' (331) thus stressing the empirical and experiential nature of education, even conflating it with philosophy itself. Such a philosophy of education inevitably contains utopian elements, but it can provide the educator with a heuristic tool to reconstruct experience.

The practical education needs of many students will include the ability to decode English language materials and to communicate in writing, while for some, the ability to communicate in spoken English will be required. These communication needs have been the goal of English education since Japan was forced to abandon its self-imposed isolation from the world in 1854, in 1945 when it was forcibly reintegrated into the global economy, and now more than ever in the competitive era of "globalization".

In the Japan of the nineties significant changes seem to be taking place in people's values and expectations. The cumulative effect of a succession of political and financial scandals has been a steady erosion of public trust in authority, while the authoritarian, gerontocratic social order itself is being questioned by a cynical and alienated populace who appear to be tending more to their personal lives and developing a greater sense of individuality. The pace of change seems to be accelerating as, ironically, the economic recession has resulted in more leisure opportunities for many Japanese to enjoy the influx of foreign ideas and products, and to experience for themselves travel and life abroad, all of which have led to an interest in foreign languages and cultures for personal satisfaction, constituting a social phenomenon that shows no sign of abating.

The significance of these changes can scarcely be overstated. The Japanese often refer to their society as "*kanrishakai*", that is, a society managed from above ; the neo-Confucian values of the education system reflect this authoritarian system where social ideals emphasize the individual's social role over the development of individuality. Even today, the boundaries demarcating the spheres of the public and the private remain blurred to an extent inconceivable and unacceptable to the more individualistic mind-set seen in western democracies (see Doi, 1986). The idea of self-development through individuality has always been an alien concept, since it was considered incompatible with the role of social integer in service to the community (Rohlen, 1978 : 129-147).

Today's trend of self-cultivation may be seen as a break with the past. Now it seems that the Japanese are ready to embrace the modernizing project of democracy and individual self-fulfillment that their past has denied them. Such a reading of Japan's current social situation would seem to indicate that the young generation would be responsive to a philosophy of education that reflects the sweeping changes in social trends and individual attitudes, empowering students to cultivate a deeper, more sophisticated understanding of the self, the Other and the world, thus leading to what is surely one goal of education : to pose and try to answer the question "How can we learn to

coexist as civilized human beings, and share the world with other living creatures?"

Because of the American role in the reconstruction of post-war Japan, for many Japanese the world outside means the USA. This relationship is complex and problematic involving questions of Japanese cultural identity and modernity (see Miyoshi and Harootunian, 1989). Although japanologists have not come to a consensus in this debate, Yoshimoto's claim that Japan is in "an ambivalent geopolitical position : economically part of the First World but culturally part of the Third World" appears to be a fair appraisal (Miyoshi and Harootunian, 1991 : 256).

Yoshimoto's definition as a working hypothesis allows for the application of Freire's notions of pedagogy of liberation (originally devised for analphabetic Brazilian peasants) to problems of Japanese education. Parallels can be found between Brazil and Japan from the "culture of silence" to the "director society". Freire writes that the role of education should be to empower people to develop "an increasingly critical attitude toward the world and so to transform it" (1973 : 34). Such an approach may seem radical, but given the stagnation and lack of vision in Japanese education, it seems to be worth a try despite the skepticism of Davidson and Dunham (1997), if it can liberate the critical thinking and creativity of students hitherto suffocated in the repressive environment of the Japanese school system. Indeed, Monbusho has implicitly recognized this need by proposing the introduction of modern history studies for 2003 (*Asahi Evening News*, July 28, 1997) and recently allowing a new class into the school curriculum : "*hyogenka*" which translates as "self-expression class" a concept until now alien to Japanese education. Bruce Feiler, a contemporary witness of the education system, records in *Learning to Bow* the reverse culture shock experienced by a Japanese student returning home after having attended an American school :

"Japanese classes seemed so boring," she remembered. "Nobody raised their hands. Nobody answered questions. Nobody spoke in class except the teacher. School was like a factory pouring information into students as if we were canned peaches" (1991 : 282).

Here the rotten core of the Japanese education system is revealed ; it would be no exaggeration to state that her observation contains in a microcosm, as it were, the three major problems to be addressed by a communicative pedagogy : student motivation, learning materials (subject matter) and teacher-centered (monologue) classes.

This thesis will focus attention on ways of dealing with these three problems endemic to Japanese education since they are central to any communicative approach, and suggest that the key to implementing communicative teaching can be best found in content-based lessons that demand the students' active participation (Brinton, Snow, and Wesche, 1989). While arguing for an innovative approach to teaching (especially radical criteria for the selection of affective content), it is also hoped that the outlines of a coherent philosophy of education will become visible as a vade mecum through the trial and error of an empirical pedagogy. Furthermore, ideas from linguistics, film and literary

criticism, and other disciplines may be serviceable as signposts pointing the way forward since education is nothing if not an anthropological project that should take into consideration all human knowledge and culture, no matter what the object of study may be, for in the words of Dewey : “the more connections and interactions we ascertain, the more we *know* the object in question” (Ayer and O’Grady, 1994 : 116).

A communicative approach to English teaching must therefore go beyond the narrow confines of grammar-translation, drill-centered instruction and dogmatic methodologies. But the teacher should aim even higher, embarking on the challenging and exciting journey that can transport the class to the realms of the imagination to encourage critical thinking and creative communication. In the pursuit of knowledge and wisdom teachers and students need to go beyond mere words, striving together for the examined life in a communicative dialog that invites mutual attention and respect, for just as the child may be father of the man, so ideally, may the student become educator of the teacher.

Finally, lest one underestimates the seriousness of this enterprise or overlooks the teacher’s stake in its success, one would do well to reflect on the consequences of failure summed up in the sardonic verdict of perhaps the most famous of all students who ever mastered the English language, Konrad Korzeniowski, aka Joseph Conrad :

Words, as is well known, are the great foes of reality. I have been for many years a teacher of languages. It is an occupation which at length becomes fatal to whatever share of imagination, observation, and insight an ordinary person may be heir to. To a teacher of languages there comes a time when the world is but a place of many words and man appears a mere talking animal not much more wonderful than a parrot (*Under Western Eyes*).

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