

# Experimental English Teaching in Rissho Junior High School

William L. Moore  
and  
Kazuko Okamoto

As English teachers interested in developing the four language skills and in stimulating international cultural attitudes within junior high school students, we began to move directly toward our goals in April, 1957, with a first-year class and a second-year class in Rissho. We set out to explore means of accomplishing our goals within classes of 55 students where a teacher, intent upon developing the four skills through individual work, must invent time-economizing devices. Both classes were in the hands of the regular teacher, Miss Okamoto, five periods a week ; Mr. Moore gave his assistance three periods each week.

Our project moved off with the approval of the Chairman of the Language Division, ICU, and with the encouragement of the Administration of Rissho.

Having established our broad aims, our task was to devise, apply, and test means of reaching them. From the beginning, we were determined not to follow slavishly any prescribed system of language teaching but to borrow common-sensically from all successful systems. We favored the oral approach, but we believed that reading and writing should go along with oral-aural work with increasing importance. We did not like the ponderous translation method, but we made sure that the students knew the Japanese equivalents of all the patterns we presented. We did not accept the direct method because it becomes time-consum-

ing as grammar-structure becomes more complicated; we used the Japanese language to explain wherever necessary. However, we were aware that accomplishment in English does not depend upon a teacher's lectures in Japanese but upon the student's opportunities for classroom practice of grammar-structure.

We cannot, as yet, statistically evaluate each of our devices, but we say that the over-all accomplishments of the students in both classes have given us gratification though not complete satisfaction.

This article will outline our efforts to make English *vocationally* and *socially* as well as academically useful for Japanese youth. It will also indicate some of our planned steps during 1959-60.

(1) In the teaching of penmanship, we economized on precious classroom time by having the students use a series of three copy books in home tasks. We found that, with a minimum of guidance, the students gained proficiency.

(2) Since we wanted the students ultimately to think in English—to express thoughts in speech and in writing with increasing fluency, not grope for vaguely remembered words and structure—we have used pattern practice devices almost every day for these two years.

(a) *Pattern Practice Prior to Intensive Textbook Reading*

During the opening six weeks of the first year of English study, pattern practice absorbed 95% of the class work. Within this period, we were able to get nearly all students to use with oral fluency 75 to 80 patterns involving singular and plural forms of affirmative, negative, and interrogative structures built around "to be," "to have," and personal pronouns. The device used constantly was a set of thirty 18"×12" cards on which were printed 21 Japanized English items (radio, sofa, banana, tulip, etc.) and 9 persons (catcher, pitcher, driver, etc.). After listening to us

establish each new pattern, the class, in rapid chain-reaction, took over the work of questioning and answering one another, interrupted only when it was necessary for us to correct pronunciation or intonation.

Because we wished to begin the simultaneous development of four skills, the reading and writing of many of the sentence patterns was done during this six-week intensive oral period.

(b) *Pattern Practice After Textbook Reading*

The materials for pattern practice were, for the most part, lifted out of the lessons and handled with variations of form, tense, and modifiers. This is the schedule we followed for pattern practice in each lesson: First, having separated the *patterns for practice* from the *patterns for recognition only*, we borrowed a device from the Michigan system. To establish a habit response, we put the students through rapid-fire drill in which the teacher provided the substituted items within the pattern and the children responded enmasse automatically without thinking. This, we emphasize, is the *drill phase* of pattern practice. It gives the teacher no indication of the individual's ability to use a pattern with his own vocabulary. Thus, the drill was followed immediately with creative sentence practice. In the *creative phase*, we dealt with problems of thinking in English—problems in structure mastery and vocabulary usage in addition to pronunciation and intonation. In the creative phase, we simultaneously practised structure and vocabulary with the use of our *Word List* (Hosei Daigaku Shuppan), a printed folder of about 400 terms (chiefly nouns) arranged by families of words—parts of the body, people at work and play, things of the home, things to eat, etc.).

(3) Dictation of sounds was begun in the early weeks of the first year and used continuously thereafter in both classes. The purposes of this kind of dictation were to establish a relationship

between the ear and the eye and to insure better oral and silent reading when the time came to make intensive use of the textbook. Without dictation of sounds, we feared students would not derive benefit from their intensive oral work ; we felt that they would only be mouthing masses of sounds, the letters of which they would not readily recognize when they began reading. Students had to know, we believed, that [ə] [θ] [i] and [i:] for the ear meant r, th, i and e for the eye. We opposed the idea of burdening students with learning phonetics in their first two years of study. Gradually, therefore, we made students familiar with elements on our *Pronunciation Chart* constructed on a simple system of indicating pronunciation without respelling (or with minor respelling). Our system is a modified version of that found in *Webster's Dictionary* used in teaching sounds to American children.

(4) The steps which should follow pattern practice are controlled composition and, eventually, free composition. Free composition—meaning free expression in English—being impossible for young learners, we invited 2nd-year students to write letters to America using their own vocabulary within the limits of 30-35 suggested creative sentence patterns. This controlled composition device allowed students to express themselves with enough freedom of vocabulary to encourage them but without complete freedom of structure to discourage them. (Incidentally, the water-color painting, photograph, or personally made souvenir of Japan sent along with each letter impressed the American children. Quite by chance, a representative of the receivers of the letters came to Japan and paid a stimulating visit to Rissho.)

(5) Stressing the cultural contents within our own Mombusho-approved textbooks, *Standard English* (Kyoiku Shuppan), we pointed out to 2nd-year students the interesting similarities and

the exciting differences within Japan and America. Knowing that all our students could not go to senior high school and that only a small percentage would attend a university, we felt an obligation to use the literature in the textbooks to stimulate international attitudes which the children might retain long after disuse had rusted most of their sentence patterns. Moreover, we did not want children to feel isolated from their Japanese heritage when they entered the English classroom. Our purpose of inter-relating cultures was to create a respect for foreign cultures and to increase pride in the national heritage.

(6) To further the students' cultural interests and their ability with the language, a volume from our series of supplementary readers, *Windows on the World* (Kogakusha), based on graduated grammar problems, was given for outside reading.

(7) To share these devices and approaches with teachers-in-service and teachers-in-training, we have held five demonstrations thus far.

In 1959-60, we plan to make these augmentations in the program:

(1) We want to assist all competent volunteers among the 2nd- and 3rd-year students in letter writing (controlled composition) and in letter exchange through the International School Correspondence agency in Japan.

(2) We want again to hold a festival of some of the international films which are available to teachers in Tokyo and which are extremely useful in emphasizing the cultural backgrounds of the English-speaking world.

(3) Using all three levels of junior high school students, we want to demonstrate the devices described above for the criticisms and suggestions of teachers-in-service.

(4) Since ICU has no fuzoku chu gakko, we wish to continue

opening our classes in Rissho as an observation laboratory for ICU undergraduate and graduate students in Language Teaching.

(5) We want to put Rissho's proposed closed-circuit television system to the best use in bringing oral-aural English to all classes in the junior high school. If so desired, this system can be made available to ICU as an observation laboratory.

(6) We wish to continue testing our new language textbooks which are underway.

Our plans and our modest accomplishments have been made possible chiefly because of two factors: First, in the junior high school of Rissho, students are divided according to their academic abilities. Classes consist of homogeneous groups of superior, fluent students who move at their own tempo without hindrance and of sincere, striving students who progress without discouragement. Second, the members of the Administration at Rissho are so imbued with values of an education for life and service that a visitor, especially a foreign teacher, can sense their philosophy in the sincere classroom and social attitudes of the students.

(William L. Moore, Professor of English, ICU.)

(Kazuko Okamoto, Teacher of English, Rissho;  
and Graduate Student, ICU.)