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## **The Concept and Development of Program B in the Seigakuin English Program**

**Evert D. Osburn**

### **Introduction**

In November of 1993 Seigakuin celebrated the 90th anniversary of its founding by Disciples of Christ missionaries, which was in conjunction with the 110th anniversary of the Disciples of Christ missionary operations in Japan. One component of the celebration was a proposal to explore methods by which the educational program at Seigakuin Schools could be improved. An area of particular concern was the English language program (Kroehler, 1993).

The decision to review the English program at Seigakuin coincided very well with the establishment earlier that year of the English Language Education Research Committee on the Ageo campus. The Committee had been set up for precisely that purpose and had held its first research conference on May 7, 1993 under the auspices of the Ministry of Education and the Seigakuin University General Research Institute.

From early on in its inception, the Committee focused primarily on the first-year English program at Seigakuin University and Joshi Seigakuin Jr. College. As a result of its efforts, a formal proposal to establish a new campus-wide English program for freshmen was presented to the Presidents' Ad Hoc Committee on July 27, 1995.

The gist of the proposal was that the new English program, christened the Seigakuin English Program (SEP), would group matriculating students into three levels of ability depending upon the results of a placement test, the Secondary Level English Proficiency Test (SLEP) later being selected for this purpose. Students in every department on the Ageo campus would meet twice a week for 90 minutes each class during both semesters,

the sole exception being students in the Japanese Literature Department, who would only be required to have one semester of the SEP.

A distinguishing characteristic of the SEP as it was originally proposed is that it would have well-established proficiency goals and objectives, the overriding goal being *communicative competence* in all four language skills, with emphasis on the receptive skill of listening and the productive skill of speaking. Another salient feature of the Program as a whole was that each level would also have clear-cut vocabulary goals, based upon the latest lists of high-frequency English words. The proficiency and vocabulary goals for the respective programs were determined to be as follows :

<u>Level</u>	<u>Proficiency Goal</u>	<u>Vocabulary Goal</u>
Program A	Intermediate High	3,000 words
Program B	Intermediate Mid	2,500 words
Program C	Intermediate Low	2,000 words

The proposal made in July 1995 was accepted by the leadership of Seigakuin Schools, and it provided impetus for further research and planning to be done on the SEP, with the school year beginning in April 1996 being set as the inaugural date for it to officially commence. A sub-committee was then formed with the assignment to begin developing each of the three Programs of the SEP in detail. This writer was given responsibility for Program B of the SEP, and what follows is a description of the evolution process of that particular Program.

### **Needs Analysis**

The Griffee Curriculum Model has provided the framework for the step-by-step process that has been undertaken in the development of Program B of the SEP (Griffee, 1994). The

particular aspects of the Model which have been emphasized up to this point are needs analysis, goals and objectives, testing, syllabus design, and materials, respectively.

The reader will note that “needs analysis” is in the initial position in the Model. Professionals in the field of English curriculum development have come to realize that determining the *target needs* (what the learner needs to do with the language in the real world) as perceived by students is a crucial step in the process of curriculum renewal. The fact that needs analysis is the first step in the process is emphasized by two experts, who flatly state, “Any course should be based on an analysis of learner need.” (Hutchinson and Waters, 1987, pp. 53-4).

Anticipating that a needs analysis would be an important component of the development of any new curriculum that Seigakuin would determine to undertake, the *Seigakuin Needs Analysis Questionnaire* was formulated and distributed to the students on the Ageo campus in January 1995. Fifty-four percent of the entire student body responded to the 48-question *Questionnaire* (1,145 of 2,119 students). The results, which directly pertain to the SEP, are as follows :

- Over 80% of the students at the University and the Jr. College project that speaking (64.6%) or listening (16.5%) will be the skill they will use most after graduation.
- The majority of students on this campus desire to be able to understand movies, TV, etc, and to be able to speak with foreigners overseas. They are uninterested in academic reading and writing.
- Respondents reported that the skills of speaking and listening needed more emphasis in their English classes (50% and 17%, respectively). Less than 10% of the students felt a need to spend more time on reading or writing.
- Conversational topics are what the majority of students want to study in English.

- Seigakuin collegiates overwhelmingly regard understanding native speakers and English-speaking cultures, communication in everyday situations, and speaking fluently as either important or very important reasons why they are taking English classes.
- Half of the entire student body would like to spend six months or more overseas.
- Over 60% of the student body has an interest in the STEP test, particularly Level 2. There is also considerable interest in the TOEFL and TOEIC tests (Osburn, 1995a).

While more could be gleaned from the needs analysis done on the Ageo campus, a clear pattern has already emerged. What the vast majority of Seigakuin students believe they need is an English program that emphasizes speaking and listening. Their primary interest is in “survival English,” which they anticipate utilizing when they come into contact with foreigners while traveling abroad, with friends from overseas, or when they are involved in some form of entertainment through the mass media where English is the means of communication.

There is also an anticipated need for performing well on the STEP test. Even though the validity of the STEP has been questioned by J.D. Brown and other experts in the field of testing, it is simply a reality that it is by far the most well-known English test in Japan, and students’ results on it can have repercussions in the job market.

Recognizing this fact, developers of the SEP have determined to offer one practice STEP at the end of each semester for those students who would like to hone their skills on the test. While time constraints and other factors render it impractical to teach specifically to the STEP, it is the school’s desire to meet its students’ needs in this area by giving them an opportunity to determine their strengths and weaknesses through practice STEP tests, thereby preparing them for the actual test.

After having discussed the results of the *Seigakuin Needs*

*Analysis Questionnaire*, program designers focused attention on producing workable goals and objectives which would take the learners' needs into account for each of the three levels of the SEP.

### **Goals and Objectives**

Program goals may be defined as "general statements concerning desirable and attainable program purposes and aims based on perceived language and situation needs," while program objectives are "specific statements that describe the particular knowledge, behaviors, and/or skills that the learner will be expected to know or perform at the end of a course or program." (Brown, 1995, pp. 71, 73)

As aforementioned, there are two categories of goals for the SEP: *proficiency goals* and *vocabulary goals*. Regarding the former, the English Language Education Research Committee resolved to utilize the proficiency guidelines delineated by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL).

Taking into consideration the results of the needs analysis as well as the English ability of the majority of matriculating students at Seigakuin, the proficiency level goal for Program B of the SEP was set as ACTFL's *Intermediate Mid*, the proficiency level more colloquially referred to as the "survival English" level. The Intermediate Mid level is also recognized as a "threshold" level for language learners in that, should it be attained, it "will give motivated students a basis on which to build, so that further progress can be achieved with non-native classes, or can be achieved outside of the regular academic program" (Kroehler, 1994, p. 16).

According to ACTFL, the functions learners at the Intermediate level in general should be able perform are "to maintain simple, face-to-face conversations in highly predictable settings ;

to be able to create with the target language by combining and recombining learned material ; to initiate, minimally sustain, and conclude basic communicative tasks by asking and answering simple questions; and to speak in discrete simple sentences” (Buck, 1989, p. 2-2).

Within the context of informal situations and the transactional settings of everyday life, Intermediates will be able to speak with some accuracy using basic grammatical structures and will have the vocabulary necessary to be comprehensible to sympathetic native speakers.

The content of a course with the Intermediate level as its goal includes everyday survival topics such as biographical information, hobbies, ordering in a restaurant, asking for directions, etc. (Hadley, 1993).

Program B of the SEP, like the other two levels, will include instruction in all four skills, but emphasis will be primarily upon *speaking* and *listening*, the two skills most necessary to achieve conversational fluency. The speaking goal of Program B is to produce Intermediate Mid Level speakers who will be capable of successfully handling a variety of uncomplicated, basic, and communicative tasks in common social situations, such as those stated above. The listening goal is for students who complete Program B to be able to recognize sentence-length statements and questions on a variety of “survival” topics, including lodging, transportation, and shopping. The listening tasks required of Intermediate Mids pertain not only to spontaneous face-to-face conversations but also to limited, routine telephone conversations, simple announcements, and short reports over the media (Buck, 1989).

Regarding vocabulary, recent scholarship in the field of language acquisition has determined that the often neglected area of vocabulary building should be an essential component of the language curriculum, especially at the novice and intermediate

levels. With this in mind, developers of the SEP decided to make vocabulary learning an integral part of the entire Program.

The vocabulary goal of the SEP's Program B is for the students to acquire both passive and active knowledge of the 2,500 highest frequency words in English. Learners able to achieve this goal would be able to recognize approximately 85% of what they would encounter in daily conversational English.

Considerable effort was expended by Seigakuin researchers in order to derive the 2,500 words which occur with the highest frequency in spoken English. Various word lists were collated by computer, with the most useful ones being those of the *Cambridge English Lexicon* (1981), the *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English, 3rd Edition* (1995), and the new *Cambridge International Dictionary of English* (1995). A 3,000-word *SEP Master Vocabulary List* was constructed, from which all of the target vocabulary for the three levels of the SEP were derived.

With the general proficiency and vocabulary goals thus being established, the Program B developer focused attention on the critical area of testing.

### **Testing**

Professor James D. Brown of the University of Hawaii at Manoa identifies the four most important types of decisions that must be made in language programs as being those involving *proficiency, placement, achievement, and diagnosis* (Brown, 1995). This being the case, the English Language Education Committee has paid close attention to the development and use of tests in the SEP.

As mentioned earlier, the Educational Testing Service's SLEP test, a norm-referenced proficiency test, was chosen as the instrument by which administrators would determine placement in the SEP. The SLEP will be administered to all in-coming freshmen during Student Orientation Week in the beginning of



April, and they will be placed in one of the three levels of the SEP based on the results. As of this writing, it is being anticipated that the students who will be placed in Program B will have SLEP scores in the range of 31-37, which is roughly equivalent to a TOEFL score range of 300-350.

On the first day of classes students will then be given the Program B Pre-test and a vocabulary test modeled upon the style of Professor Paul Nation's "Vocabulary Levels Test" (Nation, 1990). These will be primarily diagnostic in nature, and their purpose is two-fold.

First, the tests are to enable teachers to determine what the students do and do not know in relation to what is going to be taught in the course. The objectives of Program B were very much in mind as its designer went about the task of preparing the pre-test, just as the vocabulary target of 2,500 words is known to be the teaching goal for the vocabulary component of the Program.

Second, since identical tests will be readministered to students at the end of the semester, it will be possible for teachers to ascertain how much improvement each student has made. This will enable educators to evaluate the performance of the students and the effectiveness of the instruction being given.

Traditional written quizzes will be a part of Program B, but what makes it and the rest of the SEP unique among most current language curricula is its utilization of two oral "prochievement" tests as the midterm and final examinations. Since the proficiency goals of Program B focus on speaking and listening, it was decided early on that only oral testing could adequately measure the progress being made in those areas.

As one may anticipate, an oral prochievement test is a hybrid proficiency and achievement examination. Professor David Hiple of the University of Hawaii in Honolulu charted the distinguishing characteristics of achievement, proficiency, and

prochievement tests in the following manner :

<u>Achievement Tests</u>	<u>Proficiency Tests</u>	<u>Prochievement Tests</u>
test what was taught	test what a person can do	test what was taught in a meaningful and realistic context
cover limited material	cover unlimited material	simulate real-life usage
can be studied for	can be practiced for	involve study and practice ; measure progress toward proficiency goals
norm-referenced	criterion-referenced	both—learners perform with limited learned material
administered often	administered only after major intervals	administered at regular intervals

(Hiple, 1995)

Primarily due to time constraints, the amount of material which can reasonably be expected to be mastered must necessarily be restricted. The oral prochievement tests will give learners the opportunity to verbally demonstrate that they have attained proficiency in the limited material which is required of them, which, of course, is selected with the goals and objectives of the course in mind.

In order to adequately conduct an oral proficiency test on a large scale, the test must be thorough yet flexible, accurate but easy to grade. The Committee researched various methods that are useful in conducting oral tests, while at the same time reviewing a number of scoring methods for them. After having

compiled the results, the *SEP Oral Prochievement Test Score Report Form* was devised.

Five categories are included on this form. They are listed and described below.

A. Overall Comprehensibility : How well does the student make himself understood?

How is his pronunciation? Is there evidence of preparation for the test?

B. Vocabulary : What is the breadth and precision of vocabulary used?

C. Grammatical Accuracy : How much grammatical precision is demonstrated while speaking?

D. Fluency : How smoothly does the language flow?

E. Listening Comprehension : How well does the learner understand the questions that are asked?

Teachers of the SEP realize, of course, that oral testing through interviews, role plays, pictures and picture stories, instructions/descriptions/explanations, and the making of appropriate responses is a type of examining which is foreign and intimidating to many students. However, experience has shown that, when learners become accustomed to oral testing, it becomes a very effective method of determining just how proficient they have become with the material taught in the class.

To summarize, the testing battery common to all three levels of the SEP consists of the SLEP placement test, the Program pre-test/post-test, various written quizzes given regularly throughout the semester, and two major oral prochievement tests per semester.

The types and number of tests in each Program of the SEP having been decided upon by the Committee, attention was turned towards the production of a workable syllabus.

## Syllabus

A syllabus may be defined as “that part of the curriculum activity concerned with the specification and ordering of course content or input” (Nunan, 1988). There are many types of syllabi, which are based upon the relative merits the designer places upon vocabulary, grammar, tasks, situations, functions, and topics. In fact, recent scholarship has concluded that “the job of the syllabus designer is to combine *all* of these elements to a greater or lesser degree, depending upon the needs of the students” (Harmer quoted in Osburn, 1995b).

This writer employs the *communicative approach* to language teaching, which focuses on the need for students to express meanings that are important to them in their lives. This, in conjunction with the proficiency goals stated previously, has provided the theoretical framework for the development of the syllabus for Program B.

The Program B syllabus is structural in the sense that it has generally been sequenced from easy to difficult. However, it is primarily a *topical-functional* syllabus, as a brief overview of the Spring and Fall Semester syllabi in the appendix reveals.

The reader may note that the topics included in the syllabi are those which are associated with the Intermediate Mid level of the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines, viz., “survival English” topics. These have been sequenced by the likelihood that students may actually encounter them, although this is admittedly somewhat intuitive. The functions in the syllabi have likewise been organized by a sense of the usefulness of each as they naturally occur in tandem with a particular topic. Special care was taken to include what the author feels are the most essential “survival” topics and functions in the spring syllabus, since Joshi Seigakuin Jr. College’s Japanese Literature majors will have only one semester of English in the SEP.

Vocabulary building is not specifically included in the syllabi for Program B, but it is nonetheless associated with them. Efforts will be made to ensure that the target vocabulary is learned in context and that the vocabulary learned in any given week is carefully integrated with the particular topics being covered at that time. Twenty-five new words per week will be selected from *the SEP Master Vocabulary List* and taught. Since most classes will meet for approximately 24 weeks (excluding preparation for finals), the total of new vocabulary Program B learners will be expected to acquire is 600 words. The 1,900 easier high frequency words on the list will be assumed to already be known by the students placed in Program B.

Now that a brief description of the syllabi for Program B has been made, the focus of this article will shift to the next stage in curriculum development, that of materials design.

### **Materials**

The decision was made early in the curriculum formation process to have a required textbook for each level of the SEP. However, since teaching styles and preferences are so varied, it was determined that teachers would be offered three popular texts appropriate for each level from which to choose the one they believed most suited their needs. The three textbook choices for Program B are listed at the beginning of the Spring Semester syllabus below. Any one of them follows the communicative approach and is adequate to help a learner aspiring to the Intermediate Mid level to be successful.

In addition to the main textbook for each class and the *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English*, required of everyone in the SEP, a wide variety of supplementary materials is being developed by teachers for use in the SEP. Cloze activities, questionnaires, paired interviews, group activities, songs, games, role plays, and a host of other techniques will be utilized in the

SEP classroom, all of which may require materials preparation beforehand. Partly in order to prevent individual teachers from being overwhelmed by the daunting task of having to make all of their own materials, a decision was made to require all teachers in the SEP to meet once per week for the purpose of coordinating their efforts and sharing ideas and custom teaching materials that have proved their worth in the classroom.

In regard to materials for teaching vocabulary, resource books such as Paul Nation's *Teaching and Learning Vocabulary*, Linda Taylor's *Vocabulary in Action*, and John Morgan and Mario Rinvoluceri's *Vocabulary* have been purchased by the Seigakuin University General Research Institute for use by all of the SEP teachers. In addition, computer programs such as "Crosspuzzler" and "Wordpuzzler," specifically designed for vocabulary teaching, have become available at Seigakuin.

With these resources and others, it will be possible to make interesting vocabulary worksheets in order to teach the 25 new words per week selected from the SEP Master Vocabulary List for Program B learners.

Of course, as per the experts in the ACTFL organization, authentic materials and realia will be utilized as much as possible in Program B, not only when teaching vocabulary, but in the teaching of other aspects of the SEP as well.

### **Conclusion**

This has been a very brief overview of the concepts behind and the development of Program B of the SEP. Other aspects of curriculum development have yet to be dealt with, evaluation of the Program in particular. There remains much work to be done and various ideas must still be explored. Those which may be of particular import are the publication of an SEP Staff Handbook and an SEP Student's Guide, as well as the possible utilization of a computer program for educators such as "Grade Machine 5.0,"

which would aid the director of the Program, add professionalism to the whole SEP, and promote unity within it. Publishing vocabulary flash cards and/or incorporating Listening Laboratory work into the SEP may also prove to be of benefit, as would the hiring of a full-time SEP secretary to assist administrators and teachers.

In spite of all that has yet to be accomplished, however, this writer is confident that Seigakuin is making a significant stride in the right direction by initiating and implementing the SEP. In less than three years, the Program has come from the purely conceptual stage to fruition. Designing and implementing an innovative English program is a daunting task, but patience, flexibility, commitment, and hard work on the part of Committee members have made it a possibility. These same characteristics will enable the obstacles ahead to be overcome as the curriculum development process continues on. The ultimate result of this will be to meet the needs of our valued students as we help to prepare them for the linguistic challenges of the global village of the 21st century, at least in some small measure through the Seigakuin English Program.

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## Appendix

### SEP Program B: Intermediate Mid Spring Semester Syllabus

**Textbooks :** One of the following three textbooks will be used as the main text.

1. *Interchange I*, by Jack Richards (Cambridge University Press)
2. *New Person to Person II*, by Jack Richards (Oxford University Press)
3. *Atlas I*, by David Nunan (Heinle and Heinle Publ.)

**Dictionary :** *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English*, 3rd Edition; Compact Version (Longman Co., Ltd.)

Class Topics	Functions
1 Greetings; Classroom English; Introduction of Class Policy; <i>Vocabulary and Program B Pre-test</i>	Greeting people; asking questions related to the English classroom
2 Introductions; Personal Biographical Information; Leave-takings	Introducing oneself; asking for and giving information about self, such as address, phone number, hobbies, etc.; saying good-bye
3 Work/School	Asking for and giving information about where people work, go to school, etc.
4 Consolidation: listening and speaking activities 1-3	recycling
5 Family	Talking about family relationships

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|----|--|--|
| 6  | Preferences  | Expressing likes, dislikes, and favorites  |
| 7  | Preferences, cont.   | Same as above  |
| 8  | Consolidation: listening and speaking activities recycling 5-7   |  |
| 9  | Times and Dates  | Asking and giving the time; using days of the week, months, specific dates                                     |
| 10 | Leisure Activities and Daily Routines                            | Asking for and giving information about leisure activities and daily routines                                  |
| 11 | Leisure Activities and Daily Routines, cont.                     | Same as above  |
| 12 | Consolidation: listening and speaking activities recycling 9-11  |  |
| 13 | MIDTERM EXAMINATION (Oral Prochievement Test)                    |  |
| 14 | Schedules  | Asking for and giving information about schedules, especially those involving entertainment and transportation |
| 15 | Invitations  | Offering, accepting, and refusing invitations  |
| 16 | Invitations, cont.   | Same as above  |
| 17 | Consolidation: listening and speaking activities recycling 14-16 |  |
| 18 | Numbers (up to billion), Money, and Prices                       | Recognizing and using numbers; dealing with money  |
| 19 | Shopping   | Asking about prices and buying things in a store   |
| 20 | Shopping, cont.  | Same as above  |
| 21 | Consolidation: listening and speaking activities recycling 18-20 |  |

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|----|---|---|
| 22 | Restaurants   | Ordering a meal in a restaurant; giving cooking preferences |
| 23 | Restaurants, cont.  | Same as above   |
| 24 | Reservations  | Making reservations (restaurant, hotel, ticket)             |
| 25 | Consolidation: listening and speaking activities recycling 22-24; <i>Vocabulary and Program B Post-test</i> for Spring Semester |   |

**(26) FINAL EXAMINATION (Oral Prochievement Test)**

[**Special Option:** STEP Pre-level 2 Test\*]

\* A practice STEP Pre-level 2 Test will be offered campus-wide during finals week for any SEP student who may be interested in it.

**SEP Program B: Intermediate Mid  
Fall Semester Syllabus**

<b>Class Topics</b>	<b>Functions</b>
1 <b>(date)</b> Vacations and Travel; <i>Vocabulary and Program B Pre-test</i>	Asking for and giving information about vacations/travel experiences
2 Vacations and Travel, cont.	Same as above
3 Weekend Activities	Asking for and giving information about past weekend activities
4 Consolidation: listening and speaking activities recycling 1-3	Same as above
5 Living Quarters and Home-towns	Talking about where one lives
6 Locations and Directions	Asking for and giving locations and directions
7 Locations and Directions, cont.	Same as above

- 8 Consolidation : listening and speaking activities recycling  
5-7
- 9 People: Clothes Describing what people are  
wearing and what one likes  
to wear
- 10 People: Appearances Describing people's physical  
characteristics
- 11 People: Qualities and Emo- Describing people's charac-  
ter and feelings
- 12 Consolidation: listening and speaking activities recycling  
9-11
- 13 MIDTERM EXAMINATION (Oral Prochievement Test)
- 14 Abilities Asking and giving informa-  
tion about abilities and in-  
abilities
- 15 Comparisons Comparing people, places,  
and things
- 16 Comparisons, cont. Same as above
- 17 Consolidation : listening and speaking activities recycling  
14-16
- 18 Health Talking about the body and  
describing health problems
- 19 Permission and Advice Asking for permission and  
giving advice
- 20 Requests and Messages Making requests and leav-  
ing/taking messages on the  
telephone
- 21 Consolidation: listening and speaking activities recycling  
18-20
- 22 Past Experiences Asking and giving informa-  
tion about experiences in  
the distant past
- 23 Plans Talking about future plans

- 24 Japanese/Western Customs Discussing different customs in Japan and native-speaking English countries
- 25 Consolidation: listening and speaking activities recycling 22-24; *Vocabulary and Program B Post-test* for Fall Semester

**(26) FINAL EXAMINATION (Oral Prochievement Test)**

**[Special Option : STEP Level 2 Test\*]**

\* A practice STEP Level 2 Test will be offered campus-wide during finals week for any S.E.P. student who may be interested in it.