

Interdisciplinary Curriculum for Teaching English as a Foreign Language:

Cultural Bridge to Improve International Communication

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英語を外国語として教えるための学際的カリキュラム： 国際交流を向上させる文化の架け橋

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Abstract

Interdisciplinary curriculum is an approach using more than one discipline to examine a central theme, issue, problem, topic, and so on. The curriculum introduces students to how different subject areas influence their lives and help them see the strength of each discipline perspective in a connected way. The purpose of planning this curriculum is to develop Japanese students' skill in international communications in English as a foreign language. The curriculum includes English-speaking people's history, culture and so forth, especially Americans as well as the English language. Students have opportunities to analyze the differences between American culture and the American way of thinking and those of the Japanese in the curriculum.

Key words : interdisciplinary curriculum, EFL, international communication, language & culture

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抄 録

学際的カリキュラムとは、中心的議題、課題、問題などを考えるのに複数の専門分野を用いる研究方法である。このカリキュラムは各々異なった専門分野が強く連結し、自分達の生活にどのように影響を与えているかを生徒に認識させる。ここでは、外国語としての英語を使って、国際交流の能力を高めることを目的としている。学生は、このカリキュラムの中で英語だけではなく英語圏の人々（特にアメリカ人）の歴史や文化を学習することによってアメリカと日本の文化や考え方の違いをも学ぶ。

キーワード : 学際的カリキュラム、EFL、国際交流、言語と文化

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1. Introduction

Students sometimes discuss the irrelevance between the course work in their English classes and their lives out of school, and they complain that what they study in school doesn't fit their needs in the real world. The interdisciplinary curriculum is an approach using more than one discipline to examine a central theme, issue, problem, topic, and so on. For instance, when students learn the English language, they study not only the language but the English speaking history and culture. The curriculum introduces students to the ways different subject areas influence their lives and help them see the strong connectedness of each discipline perspective. Although schools should continue to focus on specific disciplines, they also need to create a learning experience demonstrating the relationships between the disciplines periodically. The interdisciplinary curriculum is a holistic approach from Plato's idea of unity being the highest good in all things (Jacobs, 1989).

In Japan, English education is very important and it is a mandated subject for three years in middle schools and for three years in high schools. In college, taking English classes is required for the first two years. Moreover, if a student majors in English, the student has to learn English for four years. Most of the students in Japan have experienced learning English for six to ten years; nevertheless, they are not good at communicating with people in English. The reason why they are reluctant to communicate with people in English is, as Kitao (1979) discusses, the lack of learning in Japanese schools about the culture of English speaking countries. This has kept the Japanese from communicating adequately with English speaking people. It is true that Japan and the United States have had relations for a long time and many Japanese are encountering a lot of American people, products and information. However, communication and understanding between the two were not sufficiently developed simply because Japanese people didn't know American culture well. He said, "Communication is affected by all aspects of culture----- the speaker's language and dialects, their prior experiences and knowledge, the social restrictions on directness of speech, etc." (Kitao, 1979, p.3). Wu and Stephens (1991) also describe that Cultural knowledge is crucial in language learning and second language acquisition should go hand in hand with second culture acquisition. Since Japanese culture and American culture are very different, these differences were major barriers for Japanese to communicate with Americans. Nowadays, Japanese people have a lot of opportunity to communicate with the American people. American English is very common in Japan and many Japanese learn it. Because of this, it is interesting to examine American culture as a representative from those of English-speaking countries.

This paper talks about an interdisciplinary curriculum (a pilot program), which includes American culture for teaching English as a foreign language in order to develop students'

English communication skills with English-speaking people, in particular, Americans. The study begins with literature reviews related to interdisciplinary curriculum. Although interdisciplinary curriculum is widely accepted in the U.S. today, it is difficult to find examples of this in Japan as yet. This is a kind of a new tool for curriculum design in Japan. Due to this reason, the following literature review discusses interdisciplinary curriculum in America rather than in Japan.

2. Literature Review : Interdisciplinary Curriculum in America

The website *Interdisciplinary Learning in Your Classroom* (2004) describes the roots of interdisciplinary learning in the United States. Interdisciplinary learning has been an important issue since the 1890s and the education theorist John Dewey paid much attention to this style of learning in the early 20th Century. In the 1960s the concept had a new resurgence. Educators started formulating collaborative units in order to help students train their creativity, considered the most important element in curriculum design. By the 1980s higher-order thinking skills were needed to teach students. At that time polarity existed between educators preferring discipline-field learning and those supporting interdisciplinary learning. The educators favoring the discipline-field learning were afraid that interdisciplinary curriculum would threaten the integrity of the disciplines. However, by the end of the 1980s educators gradually understood the fact that interdisciplinary learning could expand traditional teaching style, developing higher-order thinking skills and discipline-based knowledge in an integrated way. Nowadays interdisciplinary learning is widely accepted for curriculum design in various fields.

Interdisciplinary Learning in Your Classroom (2004) also discusses how interdisciplinary learning affects us. Interdisciplinary curriculum intrigues both teacher and students and encourages them to develop meaningful links among the fields. It also helps them foster more powerful thinking skills to make comparison that bridge disciplines, encouraging the application of knowledge. In addition, it enables the teacher to bridge the discipline while she creates a thoroughfare between students' needs and content. When the teacher can connect the disciplines to the past and present that are associated with students' daily lives as well as to each other, the students will find the content more interesting and exciting. Interdisciplinary learning has therefore proved to have a positive impact on students.

In their study, Mathison and Mason (1989) explain the advantages of this curriculum with an example. In his literature class, a teacher gave students the date for the birth and death of a famous author, asking them to figure out how old the author had been when she' died. However, most of the students were reluctant to answer the question because they thought they didn't have to do math in an English class. Mathison and Mason assert

that the students couldn't use knowledge they already possessed to help them solve new problems or understand new related concepts. They go on to say that our students have many advantages when exploring interconnections among subject areas they are studying. Interdisciplinary instruction provides meaning and relevance for learning because students discover fascinating and compelling relationships between disciplines. It also helps students construct a more integrated web of knowledge, facilitate the assimilation of new information and increase students' understanding of and appreciation for ideas they already possess.

Stephen, T. and Stephen, L. (1997) also tell us the advantages of interdisciplinary curriculum by using language arts. They say that interdisciplinary instruction encourages students to provoke authentic learning and causes them to desire or feel a need for what the disciplines have to offer. Authentic learning occurs when they sense that acquisition of knowledge or a skill is enabling. They then obtain the knowledge and skills through the English language. Interdisciplinary instruction makes it easier to tie language arts instruction to students' necessity. People in all field should recognize the value of the interdisciplinary approach and continue to chip away at the barriers, looking for connections between traditional disciplinary knowledge and the real needs and interests of students.

3. Goals and Basic Format of the Curriculum

The aim of the curriculum is to promote students' cognitive and affective development toward the English language and American culture to encourage smooth communication with American people. As for cognitive development, this curriculum helps Japanese students develop their English language skills and understand American culture. The cognitive objectives of the curriculum are:

1. Students will obtain skills in listening, speaking, reading, and writing English as a foreign language so that they can communicate adequately with American people.
2. Students will obtain knowledge of American culture by learning American history, American geography, American music, etc. in order to understand the background of American people.

Regarding affective development, this curriculum will help students improve their motivation to exchange their opinions with American people and their self-confidence when speaking in English.

1. Students will change their behavior and attitudes positively when they communicate with people in English.
2. Students will explain their opinions with confidence as the members of the world.

The basic format of the curriculum is interdisciplinary. The curriculum is organized

for teaching American culture in English classes in Japan. The basic discipline will be English and other disciplines such as American history, American music (especially, black music developed by African-American people), American geography will be included. The significance of this curriculum is that the interdisciplinary involvement or approaches will cover students' needs since culture involves all aspects of life. Students will learn not only basic knowledge of English as an academic subject but also practical English which will be workable in their daily lives, such as how to communicate in English with Americans, through this interdisciplinary curriculum. When the teacher can connect the disciplines to the past and present that are associated with students' daily lives as well as to each other, the students will find the content more interesting and exciting (Interdisciplinary Learning in Your classroom, 2004). In addition, they will understand how different subject areas are associated with the English language and the strength of each discipline's perspectives in a connected way. Interdisciplinary instruction provides meaning and relevance for learning because students discover fascinating and compelling relationships between disciplines (Mathion and Mason, 1989).

4. Teacher and Target Population

For this curriculum, the role of an English teacher is crucial and significant. He should not only know the students but have their trust. In addition, he should have the experience of staying at America for a few years. Such a teacher would have enough knowledge of American culture as well as English language skills to feel comfortable in his role. Since he well understands the important relationship between a language and its culture through the experience of his study abroad, he can embrace such a curriculum and impart it with great flexibility.

The target population for this project is 11th or 12th graders, and participation will be those who are interested in this project. The reasons why 11th or 12th graders were chosen were: 1.They have fundamental English knowledge to understand English video, materials written in English because they had already learned English for several years. 2. Students in their adolescent period find it easier to accept new things along with their biological and other changes. In this stage, it is quite possible for them to produce many modifications as compared to other periods (Bloom,1964). Therefore, with considerably less difficulty this age group will be able to achieve the goal of affective development of changing their behavior and attitude positively when they communicate with people in English after finishing this program.

The primary participants will be:

1. 11th or 12th graders who need and want to enroll in this class

2. The English teacher

5. Form of the Curriculum

This curriculum is a pilot program designed for two months. This course will be offered once a week (50 minutes). Therefore, it includes eight times lesson plans. However, it is possible to lengthen the time frame if required .

Materials: books, videos, CDs (music), maps, etc. (They are organized all in English).

Regarding the books selected not the whole books but some parts of each book will be used as materials. The teacher is going to make copies of what the classes need and distribute them to the students.

The basic format will be:

1. Input: Students will get the basic knowledge about American culture through lectures, reading, and watching videos.
2. Comprehension and analysis: Students will have Q&As about what they took in as well as period for discussion. By comparing American culture and Japanese culture, they will recognize the differences between the two and thus understand American culture more deeply.
3. Outcome: Students will be asked to write essays based on their own opinions and to play a drama based on the video they watch in the class.

Since American culture is too broad to learn everything in eight short periods, this program focuses especially on American freedom, individualism, and identity by using materials that discuss American independence, African-American music such as jazz, blues, rock & roll etc., and other related to these topics. In America, both American independence and African-American music are very important subjects we should not avoid when talking about American culture. After a hard colonial period, the America people finally became independent from the rule of Great Britain on July 4, 1776. This is a huge American historical event that Japanese students should learn about. In addition, Japanese students would be learning not only the music itself but also the historical background of the African-American people as well as American multiculturalism in African-American music classes. There are many different kinds of people in the United States. There are European American, African-American, Hispanic-American, Asian-American and so forth. African-American people have long constituted a large ethnic minority of the population in the U.S. They were originally brought to North America to work as slaves and not treated as human beings in those days. They were therefore struggling with finding their identity as people. African-American music was borne out of these situations and developed by them. It would not be exaggerating to say that African-American music identifies them as human beings the same as other majority

and minority people. Here, African-American music is chosen to interpret American culture because it was representative of many minority groups in the U.S. The students would also have the opportunity to listen to English together with African-American accents from the video. The definition of American culture in the study are the symbols of American culture which are very different from Japanese culture. The Japanese people have neither colonial experience nor strong multiculturalism. From these subjects the students will be able to learn well the differences between the two cultures.

When it comes to classes, basically, they should be held entirely in English. But when students have problems with understanding or explaining something, they can use Japanese. It depends on their needs. Insisting that learners speak a foreign language too much might discourage their taking in such knowledge and encourage them reactively to develop negative attitudes to the foreign language and to education generally. (Lambert, E. & Tucker, G., 1972).

6. Curriculum

Introduction

Week One

Location: English Class, 11th or 12th grade

Time: 50 minutes

Speaker: Teacher

Objective: To acquaint the students with curriculum idea

Procedure:

05 minutes: Introduction of the teacher

10 minutes: Introduction of the curriculum

The teacher will explain the program idea including rationale and the basic format. For example:

1. This is a pilot program designed to be held for two months.
2. A brief explanation as to what an interdisciplinary curriculum is.
3. The importance of the relationship between a language and its culture.
4. Why the students are going to learn these subjects.

25 minutes: Brief introduction of American history and geography: the teacher will tell the students about some important historical people and events in America by showing them a map of the United States in order to help students recognize where these events took place in America. He will also introduce the

following subjects to his students for next class reading:

1. The American colonial period
2. American independence
3. George Washington and Thomas Jefferson

10 minutes: Class questions and answers about the curriculum

Class suggestions for the curriculum

Distribution of reading materials for the next class

Materials for this lesson:

“United States History” in *The World Almanac and Book of Facts*. (Each historical item in the book is summarized concisely and it is easy to recognize American history as a whole.)

A map of the United States. (Any map is fine.)

Materials for pre-reading:

“George Washington and the Colonial Period” in *Beginning English: An instructional guide for ESL teachers*.

“The Declaration of Independence” in *Rethinking America 2: A high intermediate cultural reader*.

“George Washington is elected the first president” in *What Every American should Know about American History*.

Abstract from *Thomas Jefferson*.

(The contents of these materials are important to understanding American Independence. Because these books are for ESL students, they are written in simple English, appropriate for the students. Furthermore, these books contain some attractive pictures which enable readers to better understand American history.)

American Independence

Week Two

Location: English class, 11th or 12th grade

Time: 50 minutes

Speaker: Teacher

Objectives: Teach American Independence (main points: freedom and individualism).

Procedure:

25 minutes: Lecture about the materials distributed last week and new

information about American Independence

Check and explain difficult or new words (meanings and pronunciations)

Summarize the contents of the materials:

1. The American people's situation, the relationship between American and the Kingdom of Great Britain and so on during the colonial period.
2. A brief synopsis of the Declaration of Independence:
 - a. One of the primary principles that all men are created equal;
 - b. A democratic form of government;
 - c. The right to pursue happiness;
 - d. Thomas Jefferson and George Washington;
 - e. The constitution: the Bill of Rights guarantees individual rights along with the idea of freedom.

Accept questions from the students

20 minutes: Viewing of a video, "Independence Day"

Before showing the video, the teacher tells the students which points they should focus on:

- The theme of the video
- People's situations
- What happens? (These things are going to be discussed in the next class.)

05 minutes: Explanation about the next week's plans and others

American Independence

Week Three

Location: English Class, 11th or 12th grade

Time: 50 minutes

Speaker: Teacher

Objective: Comprehension and analysis about American freedom and Individualism

Procedure:

20 minutes: Check how much content of the materials and the video the students understand. The teacher gives the student some questions: What is the theme of the video? How do people in America celebrate Independence Day? What is the colonial period? Who is Thomas Jefferson? What did he do? Who is George Washington? What did he do?

10 minutes: Informal discussion: The student will be divided into some groups.

Topics: What does freedom mean for American people?

Compare American individualism with the importance given to the group/community by the Japanese

15 minutes: Informal discussion about the same topics in the whole class

Immediate objective: Voice what freedom means for American people and express differences between American freedom and Japanese freedom

Long-term objective: Understand American culture after recognizing the big differences between American culture and Japanese culture

05 minutes: Explanation about the next week's plans and others

American Independence

Week Four

Location: English Class, 11th or 12th grade

Time: 50 minutes

Speaker: Teacher

Objectives: Understanding differences between the American way of thinking and Japanese way of thinking.

Procedures:

10 minutes: A review of what the students talked about in last week's two topics.

* American freedom and individualism: what does freedom mean for the American people? What is American individualism? Comparison between American individualism and the importance given to the group/community by the Japanese.

35 minutes: The students will write their essays based on their own opinions. The teacher will instruct the students to consider the issues mentioned above when they write their essays. He will also explain how to organize their essays. For instance, the essay should be organized with an introduction, body, and conclusion as well as what elements they should include in each section, etc.

Topic: American individualism VS Japanese emphasizing the group

05 minutes: Explanation about the next weeks' plans and distribution of materials for pre-reading for the next class. Next weeks' plans: beginning to learn African-American music including the African American people's historical background. They will be learning about the Civil War and Abraham Lincoln. They will also discuss 'identity' considering multiculturalism.

Materials for pre-reading:

“Milestones in the Civil War” in *Don’t Know much about History*. (This article speaks about the “Civil War” briefly. Although not lengthy, it is enough for students to understand what the “Civil War” is.)

Abstract from *Commander in Chief Abraham Lincoln and the Civil War*. (It explains succinctly the relationship between the war and President Lincoln. It also concisely describes who he was, how he contributed to the war, and so forth.) Because these two articles are written in simple English, it is not so difficult for the students to recognize the contents.

“Music: Getting into the swing of it” in *Rethinking America 3: Advanced Cultural Reader*. (It has good material to help students understand American music as a whole including African-American music. The history of American music and the pictures of American famous musicians in this article are attractive.)

“Louis Armstrong” in *The Complete Idiot’s Guide to Jazz*. (Louis Armstrong is a very famous musician of African-American music. This article discusses his background and tells us his contribution to African-American music nicely.)

“What is freedom?” in *The Story of American Freedom*. (From this article the students can learn what freedom was for African-American people as well as freedom for the majority of people in America. This is described concisely.)

All materials should be interesting for students and they will enjoy reading them.

Black Music

Week Five

Location: English class, 11th or 12th Grade

Time: 50 minutes

Speaker: Teacher

Objectives: Provide knowledge about “black” music such as jazz, blue, etc. (main points: freedom from slavery and black identity) * black music: music with roots in the African cultures and developed by African-American people. African-American people are the descendants of slaves brought to America from Africa hundreds of years ago.

Procedure:

25 minutes: Lecture about the materials distributed last week and new information about American music

Check and explain difficult or new words (meanings and pronunciations)

Summarize the contents of the materials:

1. What is the "Civil War"?
2. Who is Abraham Lincoln? What did he do?
3. The relationship between the "Civil War" and Lincoln
4. Who is Louis Armstrong?
5. What is freedom for the African-American people

Accept questions from the students

20 minutes: Viewing of a video "World Jazz"

Before showing the video the teacher will tell the students which points they should focus on.

- The theme of the video
- What happens in the video? (These things will be discussed in the next class.)

05 minutes: Explanation about next week's plans and others

Black Music

Week Six

Location; English class, 11th or 12th grade

Time: 50 minutes

Speaker: Teacher

Objective: Comprehension and analysis about American music and identity

Procedure:

15 minutes: Check how much content of the materials and video the students understand. The teacher gives students some questions: What is Civil War? Who is Abraham Lincoln? What did he do? What is the theme of the video? Who is Louis Armstrong?

25 minutes: Informal discussion in the whole class

Talk about "Music: Getting into the swing of it"

Do you think black music is symbolic of black's identity?

How are the meanings of identity different between the black and Japanese?

Immediate objective: Voice the contents of the article, express the relationship between black music and black's identity and describe the student's point of view about identity

Long-term objective: Understand the black's masterpieces of music and their contribution to American culture

10 minutes: Explanation about the next week's plans

The students are going to perform a drama whose contents are based on the video, “ World Jazz”.

Decide each student’s role and assign as homework to memorize his or her dialogue by the following week.

Homework: This homework takes aim at the development of students’ English pronunciations, English rhythms, and skills of presenting in English as well as understanding the contents of the video, “World Jazz”.

Black Music

Week Seven

Location: English class, 11th or 12th Grade

Time: 50 minutes

Speaker: Teacher

Objective: Product from freedom from slavery and black identity

Procedure:

05 minutes: preparation for playing the drama: The teacher will ask the students if they are ready for the drama and their impressions before playing it.

20 minutes: Playing the drama

20 minutes: Open discussion: Reflection based on the drama

1. The students will exchange their impressions, opinions, comments, and whatever after finishing the drama.
2. The teacher will tell the students his opinions and impressions including some comments about their English pronunciations, rhythms, and presentations. For example, he will recommend that they should do this or do that in order to improve their English skills.
3. They will discuss whether they understand people in this video after playing their roles.

Immediate objective: Express their reaction after playing the drama

Long-term objective: Contribution of their experience of playing the drama to their future communication with American people

05 minutes: Explanation about the next week’s plans and others

The next week’s plans: The teacher will give the students some information about jazz that they are going to listen to next week. For instance, what jazz are they going to listen to? What is its background?

The Final Day

Week Eight

Location: Music class, 11th or 12th grade

Time: 50 minute

Speaker: Teacher

Objective: Appreciation of black music and evaluation

Procedure: Before listening to some Jazz the teacher will review a brief history of the idiom. For example, jazz was born in New Orleans, Louisiana and was developed by the African-American people. The foundation of jazz is Blues which speaks of the pain of lost love, injustice, and freedom. Louis Armstrong, also known as 'Satchmo', born in New Orleans was one of the most influential musicians in the history of jazz. Etc.

30 minutes: To listen to some jazz

Titles:

"Potato Head"

"Strutlin' with Some Barbecue"

"Hotter Than That"

Immediate objective: Enjoy the music feeling black people's spirit and soul in the student's heart

Long-term objective: Give the student a chance for a future deeper understanding of the masterpieces of music in America

15 minutes: evaluation

Questionnaire will be distributed and retrieved 15 minutes later. Some contents of the questionnaire will be:

1. Do you think your English skills such as listening, speaking, reading, and writing were improved?
2. Do you think you obtained enough knowledge about American culture that related to the subjects you learned?
3. Do you think that you will be able to communicate with American people in English better than before?
4. Do you think you will be able to clearly explain your opinions with confidence in English?
5. Some comments, opinions, etc.

05 minutes: Conclusion

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7. Conclusion

As well as English, this curriculum pays attention to American freedom, individuality, and identity because these elements are symbols of American culture and are very different from Japanese culture which emphasizes conservativeness and group harmony. For example, regarding students' attitudes in the classes, in general, Japanese students habitually focus on the group. Trying to keep harmony in the class, they don't assert their own opinions. American students emphasize their identities and individual opinions are more respected than group harmony. These differences are mainly based on their different historical backgrounds. Japanese culture reflects a long history of Confucian and Samurai values. Centralized feudalism emphasized the group and a passive, docile citizenry (Wray, 1991). This system preferred order and harmony to individuality in behavior. Japanese identity and values are to be found now within the group and society. Because of this historical background, Japanese students usually consider the harmony of a group first. On the other hand, American education historically emphasizes the individual and its inalienable rights. Most American students assert their opinions persuasively and they are used to appealing through class discussions.

Japanese education policy still emphasizes certain basic elements and the teacher has full authority. The classes students attend are in the form of lectures for the most part and the students listen to their teacher quietly while taking notes. Usually, students try to understand what their teacher says without expressing doubt and there is no discussion in the class.

However, this program includes some discussions to help Japanese students learn the

English language and American culture in the class whose atmosphere is not Japanese style but American style. It may be difficult for Japanese students to accept this American style atmosphere, but they should have such experiences to develop themselves cognitively and affectively. Language is a metaphor for culture and personal experience (Jongh, 1991, p. 288). Incorporating the teaching of culture in second language instruction is to help students develop communicative competence in the target language (Liu, 1994). The social context can enhance or confound success in learning a foreign language and communication in the foreign language. Moreover, understanding a different culture will motivate students to change their attitudes in positive ways to have smooth communication with people who speak in the target language.

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