

Teachers' Approaches to Elementary School English: An Analysis of Teacher Resource Books Recently Published in Japan

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Abstract

The present program of elementary school English in this country is termed *Foreign Language Activities*, more specifically, *English Language Activities*. It should be a motivational and attitudinal program in light of the little time given to it. However, the future prospect for English as a school subject, and a plan for it, have been made public by the government since the current program was established in 2011 by thoroughly enacting the 2008 curriculum guidelines. In this situation, I attempt to understand the state of *English Language Activities* in terms of teachers' own approaches to it by examining a group of recently published teacher resource books from the viewpoints of 1) teaching objectives given priority; 2) themes used for teaching units; 3) lesson planning and teaching methods; 4) teacher talking to students in English; and 5) views on children and their learning process. The analysis reveals characteristics and variations of the approaches developed by the writers of the books. Based on its results, I argue that both positives and negatives for further development toward English as a school subject can be found in their approaches. A positive is an increasing interest in teacher classroom talk in English, whereas a negative is a focus placed on practicing set dialogues in pursuit of establishing the basis of communicative ability. For further teacher development, there is the need for teachers to build a knowledge base for exploring their own teaching methods and paying attention to their students' language learning process.

Keywords: teaching approaches, Foreign Language Activities, English as a school subject,
teacher exploration, resource books for elementary school teachers

1. Introduction: Elementary school English in Japan

It is pointed out by Sallabank (1999) that many countries have proceeded from small-scaled experiments in elementary school foreign language instruction to its general provision. This applies also to the historical development of elementary school English in Japan. Government-assigned school-based exploratory studies were launched in 1992 and, according to Kageura (1997), a total of 63 schools were involved in the experimental phase in the 1990's. Then, in 2002, it was made possible for any schools to offer "hands-on activities to expose children to foreign language" as an optional

element of the then newly-introduced curriculum category termed *the Period for Integrated Studies*. More and more schools started integrating this optional element, and then the compulsory educational area named *Foreign Language Activities* was thoroughly enacted in 2011.

All elementary schools are now required to offer one class hour of instruction a week to all 5th and 6th graders. In addition, it is possible to offer more time to 5th and 6th graders, and/or a certain amount of instructional time for students in the lower grades, by utilizing another curriculum category, such as *the Period for Integrated Studies*. Unlike school subjects in the elementary school curriculum, teachers are not required to use an authorized textbook for *English Language Activities* and to make an assessment of the students' attainments in the program in the usual manner. However, a textbook entitled *Hi, friends!* is offered by MEXT. This textbook is mainly for English Language Activities, with some other languages and cultures dealt with in part of it (e.g., various greetings and gestures in the world appearing in the first unit for 5th graders). The textbook is now very commonly used.

The newest epoch-making change is the future prospect for English as a school subject that was first presented by the Education Rebuilding Implementation Council, and its subsequent plan named "the English Education Reform Plan" was released by MEXT in 2014.⁽¹⁾ This is a plan for the development of English language education that covers elementary and secondary education. According to it, elementary school English will be a school subject for 5th and 6th graders, together with a less intensified program to be offered to 3rd and 4th graders. When this plan is enacted, a teaching methods course for elementary school English will be included in the undergraduate curriculum for the elementary school teacher certificate program.

English Language Activities should be a motivational and attitudinal program. The time given to it is 45 minutes a week, 35 weeks a year, which makes 52.5 hours in total for a two-year course. No one would deny that, with this little time, elementary school students can never develop language proficiency in English and communicative ability in the language in a substantial manner. Furthermore, the teacher's assessment is supposed to be made by children's attitudinal and motivational attainments.⁽²⁾ For this purpose, the teachers' classroom observations and students' self-evaluation sheets are often used.

Some models of elementary school foreign language programs developed by researchers help us to define *English Language Activities* as a program type. One is the "sensitization" model as opposed to the "language acquisition" model by Driscoll (1999). The former highlights motivational and attitudinal aspects of learning, dealing with listening and speaking, whereas the latter focusses on the development of students' proficiency in the target language and thus may be said to be synonymous with foreign language teaching in traditional terms. The time borderline between these two is "one hour a week": one hour or less for "sensitization" and one hour or more for "language acquisition" (1999: 21). It is important to note that Driscoll (1999) argues that if a "language acquisition" model is introduced into elementary school education, its continuity with secondary foreign language learning is to be a key factor for success, but not very much so in a sensitization model. Driscoll's dichotomy is similar to the distinction between "FLEX" (Foreign Language Exploratory or Experience) and "FLES" (Foreign Language in the Elementary School) as dealt with by Curtain and Pesola (1994), and also to Sharpe's dichotomy (2001) between "a more diffuse notion of learning something of a foreign language but mainly learning to enjoy the process of language learning for its own sake" and "a single-minded focus on language acquisition."

Johnstone's models (1994) are also useful. He defines five models along the continuum of the degree of intensity with which the target language is used. In the middle position lies "subject teaching" (i.e., teaching a foreign language as a school subject), and for this type of program Johnstone estimates two or three hours of instruction a week. The program types which are likely to occur under an allocation of less time than in subject teaching are linguistic and cultural "awareness" and elementary "encounter" with the target language/s. On the other hand, the more intensified programs than subject teaching are the "integrative model" (which integrates a foreign language in the whole curriculum) and "immersion program" (which teaches school subjects in the target language).⁽³⁾

Despite the motivational nature of *English Language Activities* that is realized through learning about "sensitization," "awareness," and "encounter" models, the program appears to be more than a motivational program, yet less than an acquisition model and subject teaching. First, the objective of *Foreign Language Activities* stated in the 2008 curriculum guidelines implies a notion of connection between elementary and secondary education in the sense that the first half of the statement is geared to two objectives used for secondary school English, namely, "communication abilities" and "the understanding of languages and cultures."

To form the foundation of pupils' communication abilities through foreign languages while developing the understanding of languages and cultures through various experiences, fostering a positive attitude toward communication, and familiarizing pupils with the sounds and basic expressions of foreign languages.⁽⁴⁾

Another thing which could make the motivational nature of *English Language Activities* shaky is the textbook, *Hi, friends!* There is a collection of words and set dialogues which appears along with this textbook, and therefore, teachers might become more or less oriented toward such language components in the content of their teaching, greatly concerned with how they can have students practice new words and dialogues and use them in pairs and groups.

2. Brief introduction to the books reviewed

There has been a considerable proliferation of Japanese books on elementary school English, reflecting the historical development of this area as sketched in the previous section. The books analyzed in this study are Kato and Sano (2006), Ogawa (2006), Yoshida (2008), Koizumi (2011), Elementary School Attached to the Faculty of Education, Kumamoto University (2011), Akita (2011), and Kan and Omuta City Meiji Elementary School (2012). Kato, in Kato and Sano (2006), Yoshida (2008), and Kan, in Kan and Omuta City Meiji Elementary School (2012), are university professors and researchers, whereas the other writer of Kan's book (2012) and those of the other four books have actually been engaged in teaching elementary school students. All citations in the following sections are my translations, except where the writer him- or herself offers English phrases. Therefore, I am responsible for any flaws and inadequacies to arise when transforming the writers' original meanings into English. General information on each book follows, with my English translation of the original publication information placed in the square brackets.

- (1) 加藤幸次・佐野亮子 (編著) 2006 『学級担任が教える小学校の英語活動—英語で総合学習をしよう』
研究社

[Kato, K. and Sano, R. (eds.) 2006. *Elementary School English Language Activities that Homeroom Teachers Teach: Let's Have Integrated Studies in English*. Tokyo: Kenkyusha.]

Reflecting the status of English in the elementary school curriculum those days, Kato and Sano are concerned with doing things in English in *the Period for Integrated Studies* (e.g., cooking, arts and crafts, using a computer, going out to explore nature or to conduct fieldwork, and cultural exchange events with people from outside Japan). They argue that *the Period for Integrated Studies* is the most appropriate context for activities in English (2006: 87-88). The book consists of four major sections: 1) explanations of their approach; 2) four or five lesson plans under each of their nine themes (i.e., teaching procedures of each lesson which take the form of the teacher's and students' utterances, and verbal exchanges between them); 3) a list of instructional language, children's responses and expressions for daily conversation, and a list of English words for children; and 4) discussions on some issues (e.g., Why English?; the need to go beyond songs and games; a FLEX program used in Tokyo).

(2) 小川隆夫 (著)・松香洋子 (監修) 2006 『先生、英語やろうよ』 松香フォニックス研究所
[Ogawa, T., supervised by Matsuka, Y. 2006. *Teacher, Let's Do English Activities*. Tokyo: Matsuka Phonics Institute.]

This book contains seven chapters. The first chapter is about 10 knacks for successful activities in English, and the last two chapters deal with yearly planning and lesson planning, and assessment methods respectively. The other chapters located in the middle of the book are concerned with specific teaching materials and content, dealing with four method types: 1) songs and chants; 2) conversation; 3) games; and 4) stories. A CD was made with the help of musicians, and is attached to the book, so that children can get familiar with the sound and rhythm of English and a lot of expressions in English. All the teaching materials used for the book are from Matsuka Phonics Institute.

(3) 吉田研作 (監修) 2008 『小学校英語指導プラン完全ガイド』 アルク
[Yoshida, K (editorial supervision). 2008. *Perfect Guide to Lesson Planning for Elementary School English*. Tokyo: ALC Press Inc.

The whole of this book addresses the aspect of lesson planning. It consists of four sections. Part 1 discusses some basic issues on making lesson plans, such as why it is necessary to make a lesson plan, what are important things to consider when making lesson plans, and what procedures should be followed to make a lesson plan. Part 2 is divided into six sections, according to the six steps in each lesson in order, from the initial greeting to a summary of the lesson and the ending greeting. Each section presents a group of activity types, intended to expand a variation of activities in each step in a lesson. Part 3 presents lesson plans theme-by-theme under ten themes set up for the book. Each plan relates to the grade level/s to which the plan can be applied, and includes teaching aids, a range of English expressions usable under the theme, according to the grade level, and an outline of each step (or teaching procedure). Part 4 offers a collection of picture cards, templates for yearly planning and lesson planning, and the materials contained in the CD attached to the book.

(4) 小泉清裕 2011 『[小学校]英語活動ネタのタネ』 アルク
[Koizumi, K. 2011. *Seeds of Ingredients for Elementary School English Language Activities*. Tokyo: ALC Press Inc.]

In this book Koizumi presents a 2-year course plan for 5th and 6th graders, with explanations of a group of selected activities and English expressions for teacher talk under the theme of each unit. In addition, he inserts one-page columns between units which take the form of a teacher's question about *English Language Activities* and Koizumi's answer to it. A CD is attached to the book. Koizumi is an English teaching expert who has taught at all educational levels from elementary to higher education. The book shows a principled and coherent manner of teaching, which seems to have been possible by the writer's expertise and teaching competence, including his fluency in English. As discussed in the following section, Koizumi's approach can be characterized as thematic teaching and as a content-based approach.

- (5) 熊本大学教育学部附属小学校 (著) 2011 『小学校英語活動 365 日の授業細案—すぐ使えるゲーム & イラスト集』 明治図書
 [Elementary School Attached to the Faculty of Education, Kumamoto University. 2011. *Elementary School English Language Activities 365-Day Lesson Plans: A Collection of Games and Illustrations Usable Right Away*. Tokyo: Meijitoshō.]

The first edition of this book was published in 2005 in the times of English-related activities as an optional element of *the Period for Integrated Studies*. The book shows the activities in English actually conducted at the school with 3rd, 4th, 5th and 6th graders. It has seven sections which include: 1) basic thoughts about English activities at the school; 2) six reports on usual manners of conducting activities in English (including playing a drama and broadcasting a conversation program); 3) a collection of 24 games; 4) yearly plans for each of the four relevant grades; 5) weekly lesson plans for each grade (35 plans for 3rd, 4th and 5th grades and 31 plans for 6th grade); 6) a collection of illustrations; and 7) how to use the CD attached to the book.

- (6) 秋田裕子 2011 『これ一冊のできる小学校英語活動 基本編—新学習指導要領対応』 径書房
 [Akita, Y. 2011. *Elementary School English Language Activities that Can Be Conducted with This One Book, Basic Edition: Along with the New Curriculum Guidelines*. Tokyo: Komichi-shobo.]

The central part of this book (which covers more than 100 pages) is addressed to 5th and 6th grades. It deals with 11 teaching units in order and two sections for activities related to Halloween and Christmas. Each section for the teaching units includes the aim of the unit, checkpoints of classroom teaching, a couple of lesson plans for teaching procedures related to basic activities, and explanations of the activities (including songs, chants and games). This central part is preceded by general accounts of the program: the teaching objective; how to use this book; how to start and end a lesson; a table of a yearly plan for 25 lessons on basic activities in English; and how to make illustrated cards. It is followed by tables of yearly plans for the lower grades (1st through 4th grades). According to the book, Akita had been engaged in activities in English at a public elementary school in Tokyo since 2003 as a local human resource, and at the time of publication, she was working to help elementary and secondary school teachers with English programs as a coordinator in the city where the school is located.

- (7) 菅正隆 (編著)・大牟田市立明治小学校 (著) 2012 『外国語活動を徹底サポート “Hi, friends!” 指導案&評価づくりパーフェクトガイド』 明治図書
 [Kan, M. (ed.) and Omuta City Meiji Elementary School. 2012. *Thorough Support for Foreign Language Activities: Perfect Guide for Lesson Planning and Assessment with the use of “Hi, friends!”* Tokyo: Meijitoshō.]

This is the only book in the group of seven books that deals with how to make lesson plans along with the textbook from MEXT, *Hi, friends!* Starting with some of the major points to consider (e.g., What is communication activity?), the book holds two major sections for 5th and 6th grades respectively. Each section includes plans for 35 lessons with the same format, assessment points for two sample units (in terms of communication, getting familiar with English, and awareness of languages and cultures), sample statements by the teacher in grade reports with regard to the assessment points, forms used unit-by-unit for the teacher's assessment of each student in a class, and students' self-evaluation sheets. Lastly, the book contains sample 3-minute quizzes in Japanese which can be used at the end of the lesson "when children are not very active, after a PE class, or when children are tired" (2012: 150).

3. Results of analysis and discussion

3.1 Teaching objectives

Most of the books reviewed in this study do not have a special section for the teaching objectives of the whole program. Therefore, it was necessary to draw from the writer's statements from his or her foreword or another part.

Some writers show their own teaching objectives, whereas others go along with the MEXT intentions. The members in the former group are Elementary School Attached to the Faculty of Education, Kumamoto University (2011), Ogawa (2006), Koizumi (2011), and Kato and Sano (2006).

The teaching objective of Elementary School Attached to the Faculty of Education, Kumamoto University (2011) is very holistic and global, and also communicative and cultural. It is confined to attitudinal and motivational intentions. The objective is "to open the students' eyes to the world" (2011: 7) and to develop "a spirit of international cooperation" based on the importance of the students' home country and their interest in other countries (2011: 8). As for communicative ability, the school focusses on English as a tool for international cultural exchanges and aims to cultivate "mental barrier-free" so that "children can positively communicate with people from other countries" (2011: 9). They say, "Our *English Language Activities* is not directly aimed at developing students' fluency in English" (2011: 7).

Ogawa's approach (2006) seems to be solely oriented toward language acquisition as an eventual intention. He aims at helping students to acquire prosodic features of English ("rhythm and intonation"), cultivating "a sense of language," and increasing "basic vocabulary and expression" (2006: 3), in order to have elementary school English connect to secondary school English. He argues for a notional and functional syllabus for learning to accomplish communicative functions, such as greeting, requesting and asking for clarification, rather than a commonly used situational syllabus which encourages students to learn set dialogues according to situational purposes, such as shopping at a store and giving directions on the street. Furthermore, he agrees with Lewis's lexical approach (1993, cited in Ogawa 2006: 13) which focusses on the significance of contextual learning in the form of chunks and with Matsuka's list of 96 basic expressions directly related to children's lives.

In his foreword Koizumi (2011) uses a metaphor to describe what verbal communication is like and argues that *English Language Activities* should be aimed at learning to “play catch” in English (2011: 4-5). This metaphor highlights the importance of children’s listening activities, and it could be instructive for those teachers who hold a production-oriented notion of classroom language learning. Koizumi refers to various and profound meanings of communication, which include not only skills in exchanging words with others and showing one’s message in a written form, but also the abilities to make others feel cheerful or calm, to guess the other’s feelings to respond to the situation, to build trustful relationships and to respect and love others (2011: 33). In addition, Koizumi clearly says that the aim of *English Language Activity* is “to enrich elementary school education” (2011: 27). Here, again, he uses a metaphor for elementary school education, which is a Japanese dish called “nikujaga.” By doing so, he highlights that the better taste from each school subject as an ingredient or flavor, with English Language Activities added to them, can make tastier “nikujaga.”

Kato and Sano’s objective (2006) is global, linguistic and cultural. First, a global characteristic of their teaching objective is shown in the focus placed on the importance of English in more and more intensified interrelationships between countries and the growing numbers of Japanese people who go abroad and foreigners who come to Japan. They say that what is needed today is “to educate Japanese people to be able to use and speak English when necessary,” and “elementary school English teaching should be placed at the starting point of this education” (2006: 3). Second, Kato and Sano’s orientation toward a language syllabus is shown in a list of 873 English words presented in the book that they expect children to learn. The list is preceded by a list of English expressions which includes greetings, the teacher’s instructional language, and expressions for children’s responses and daily conversations (2006: 70-82). They regard 208 words in the former list as already familiar to children. Third, Kato and Sano’s cultural intention is manifest in that they pay attention to the need to go beyond a Japanese cultural element called “ishin-denshin” (tacit understanding) and the importance of sending message with words. “In today’s highly information-oriented society one can never accomplish anything and get things done without uttering words.” (2006: 101)

The other three books are more oriented toward the MEXT objective. The guide to lesson planning supervised by Yoshida (2008) includes brief comments on teaching aims. Yoshida highlights the importance of cultivating children’s “communication ability” rather than developing their “knowledge about English” (2008: 6 & 8). This seems to be intended to draw teachers’ attention to the experiential nature of children’s learning and the need to devalue a traditional learning mode. He emphasizes that “the objective of elementary school *Foreign (English) Language Activities* is not to teach a lot of words and grammar points and have children learn them, but to deepen their “understanding of languages and cultures” and to cultivate their “attitudes toward positively communicating” (2008: 8).

Kan and Omuta City Meiji Elementary School (2012) briefly mention their three aims which are responsive to the assessment points by MEXT: interest in, and motivation and attitudes, toward communication; familiarity with a foreign language; and awareness of languages and cultures.

Akita (2011) makes the meaning of “a positive attitude toward communication” (which is contained in the MEXT objective statement) clearer. According to Akita, the attitudinal aim is concerned with the question of whether children can relate to other children or people and try to understand them.

Like Kato and Sano (2006), she brings a Japanese cultural feature to her discussion on the importance of self-expression: “Although it is very important to have one’s own ideas and opinions and clearly express them (to other people), Japanese people are not very good at it. Let us have children understand through *English Language Activities* that it would be OK if they are different from others, that they should not be afraid of making mistakes, and that it is important to send a message to others” (2011: 14).

In order to discuss these results, it is useful to compare the component/s highlighted by each writer with the groups of common objectives reviewed by researchers residing outside Japan. Curtain and Pesola (1994) shows sample lists of aims and benefits collected in the U.S., and points out that at the time of writing emphasis had been placed on “the holistic, global, and communicative elements of language learning” (1994: 4). The books reviewed above collectively suggest this tendency. Furthermore, the linguistic element of learning is given priority by Ogawa (2006), students’ cultural characteristics are considered by Kato and Sano (2006) and Akita (2011), and both the nature of verbal communication and that of communication in general are highlighted by Koizumi (2011).

Sharpe (2001) categorizes existing intentions in the European context into eight categories, which concentrate on the two main areas of foreign language learning, namely, language and culture: 1) language acquisition; 2) language sensitization; 3) language awareness; 4) attitudes toward language learning; 5) attitudes to European awareness; 6) attitudes to multiculturalism; 7) international understanding; and 8) intercultural competence (2001: 179). As for the above language-related intentions (1), (2) and (3), the writers of the books reviewed in this study seem to stay mostly within the realms of “sensitization” and “awareness”, although some of them relate to “acquisition” more than other writers, paying attention to the ability to use English as a future aim, as in Elementary School Attached to the Faculty of Education, Kumamoto University (2011) or focusing on the linguistic aspect of learning, as in Ogawa (2006). There is an element from his linguistic aims whose importance, I think, has scarcely been recognized by elementary school teachers in this country. The important point is “a sense of language” (2006: 3). With regard to Sharpe’s attitudinal categories, in the Japanese social context of *English Language Activities*, a major focus is placed on “a positive attitude toward communication” (from the MEXT objective statement). Such aims as attitudes toward Asian awareness, attitudes toward multilingualism and intercultural competence have scarcely been discussed in the area of elementary school education in this country.

3.2 Themes used for teaching units

There is a common practice among Japanese elementary school teachers to use what is called “nenkan-shido-keikaku” (a yearly teaching plan). The plan takes the form of a table of teaching units with specific themes. Table 1 shows the themes by the writers of the teacher resource books.

Kato and Sano’s (2006) themes address the things students might do in *the Period for Integrated Studies*. Their sample lesson plans suggest a way of introducing new English words and expressions by mixed language. From the viewpoint of language acquisition, it may take time and efforts to develop teaching procedures to accomplish the aim of having students complete a given activity entirely in English. However, some kinds of activities for *the Period for Integrated*

Studies could be motivating to students and might be usable for English as a school subject. An intriguing activity is “to type out the English words you know.” This may well engage students in the elementary phase of learning to write in English.

Ogawa (2006), Yoshida (2008) and Koizumi (2011) deal with familiar topics such as things in the students’ daily lives and their immediate surroundings, which should be beneficial for elementary school students. Koizumi’s themes suggest that he is sensitive to students’ world and their growth. The first group includes some basic concepts children learn at an early stage, and the third group is related to other content areas of elementary school education.

Table 1 Themes forming teaching units

*The asterisks indicate that the writers present their themes in English.

Kato & Sano (2006)*	Ogawa (2006)	Yoshida (2008)*	Koizumi (2011)
1st grade through 6th grade	common among all grades	intended to be applicable to all grades	a 2-year course for 5th & 6th grades
for 1st & 2nd graders 1. Let's have a salad party.	April: Greeting	1. Games & Sports	basic themes
2. Let's make cards to introduce our school to your family.	May: Self-introduction	2. Food & Health Education	1. Shape
for 3rd & 4th graders 3. To explore carefully.	June: Friends	3. Everyday Activities	2. Color
4. Let's make delicious rice and curry.	July: Living things & pets	4. Things You Wear & Things You Use at Home and at School	3. Number
5. Plan to visit public places.	September: Sports	5. Animals & Plants & The Environment	4. Time
6. Let's make postcards from milk cartons.	October: Color	6. Where We Live	5. Alphabet letters
for 5th & 6th graders 7. To type out the English words you know.	November: Math in English	7. What They Do	themes from immediate surroundings
8. To share ORIGAMI with guests from abroad.	December: Introducing family	8. Events	6. At Home
9. Let's interview guests from abroad.	January: Calendar	9. People You Know	7. Animals
	February: Food	10. Communication & Human Relations	8. School & the Classroom
	March: Review & performance presentation		9. School Subjects & Timetable
			10. Sports
			11. Cooking
			12. Plants
			13. Shopping
			themes related to other school subjects
			14. Vehicles
			15. Year & Age
			16. Direction & Maps
			17. Introducing People
			18. Seasons & 12 months
			19. Comparison
			20. Weather

Elementary School Attached to the Faculty of Education, Kumamoto University (2011)	Akita (2011)	Kan and Omura City Meiji Elementary School (2012)
3rd grade through 6th grade	all grades	from "Hi, friends!" (5th & 6th grades)
themes for 5th graders:	units for 5th & 6th graders	5th grade:
1. Let's ask questions. 1 What's your name?	1. Let's greet.	1. Hello. (Let's greet in various languages in the world.)
2. Let's ask questions. 2 May I ask you something?	2. Let's learn how to talk about animals	
3. Let's ask questions. 3 How old are you?	3. Let's learn how to talk about colors and shapes	2. I'm happy. (Let's greet with gestures.)
4. Let's ask questions. 4 Summary	4. Let's learn how to talk about numbers and dates	
5. What ____ do you like the best? 1 sports	5. Let's do some shopping	3. How many? (Let's count various things.)
6. What ____ do you like the best? 2 school subjects 1	6. Let's move our bodies	
7. What ____ do you like the best? 3 school subjects 2	7. Let's give directions	4. I like apples. (Tell your friends your favorite things.)
8. What ____ do you like the best? 4 sequential conversation	8. Let's learn about countries in the world	
	9. Let's learn loan words	5. What do you like? (Interview your friends.)
9. Which do you like better, ____ or ____? 1 drinks	10. Let's learn how to talk about jobs	
10. Which do you like better, ____ or ____? 2 seasons	11. Review of the whole year	6. What do you want? (Find alphabet letters.)
11. Which ____ do you like better? 3 sequential conversation		
12. Summary of the 1st term		7. What's this? (An event for games)
13. Checks of the 1st term		
14. Review of the 1st term		8. I study Japanese. (Let's make a dream timetable.)
15. Introducing friends 1 This is my friend Kenji.		
16. Introducing friends 2 He is friendly		9. What would you like? (Let's make a lunch menu.)
17. Introducing friends 3 May I ask you something?		
18. What time? 1 What time is it?		6th grade:
19. What time? 2 What time do you get up?		1. Do you have "a"? (Let's make an alphabet quiz.)
20. What time do you go to bed?		
21. Do you _____?		2. When is your birthday? (Find your friends' birthdays.)
22. How long do you _____? 1		
23. How long do you _____? 2		3. I can swim. (Talk about what you can do.)
24. Try sequential conversation.		
25. Summary of the 2nd term		4. Turn right. (Give directions.)
26. Summary of the 1st and 2nd terms		
27. Checks of the 2nd term		5. Let's go to Italy. (Invite your friends to an overseas trip.)
28. Review of the 1st & 2nd terms		
29. Try to converse with what you learned.		6. What time do you get up? (Talk about your daily life.)
30. Let's make a video letter 1		
31. Let's make a video letter 2		7. We are good friends. (Make an original story.)
32. Let's make a video letter 3		
33. Let's make a video letter 4		8. What do you want to be? (Your dream)
34. Review of the whole year		
35. Summary of the year		

The other three, especially Elementary School Attached to the Faculty of Education, Kumamoto University (2011) and Kan and Omuta City Meiji Elementary School (2012), show an orientation toward the target language items in their themes. From the viewpoint of a sensitization program in Driscoll's terms (1999), caution needs to be given not to regard the target language items as a purpose in themselves. From the viewpoints of language acquisition, it is necessary not to forget to give priority to the meanings one intends to convey and the content of one's talk.

A question can be raised as to whether the writers' use of these various collections of themes indicates that they are commonly engaged in any types of thematic teaching. The answer to this question may be likely to be "No." if it is meant by thematic teaching that each theme and its learning content comes first in the teacher's planning and English words and sentences to be dealt with are examined later or not to be taken seriously, because there may be teachers who primarily focus on a language syllabus, at least when setting up themes for their yearly plans, like in Elementary School Attached to the Faculty of Education, Kumamoto University (2011) and Kan and Omuta City Meiji Elementary School (2012). On the other hand, Koizumi's approach (2011) is more like thematic teaching, with focusses on meanings and content. Language items are not set up for regularly occurring drills or practice, and they will show up in the teacher's talk first.

3.3 Lesson planning and teaching methods

The books show a variety of teaching procedures to be used for all lessons. Table 2 shows the steps in a lesson in their chronological order which are set up by four writers.

Table 2 Teaching procedures

Ogawa (2006)		Yoshida (2008)		Akita (2011)	Kan and Omuta City Meiji Elementary School (2012)
10 min.	common:	3 min.	greeting	greeting	Warming up
	greeting	5 min.	warming-up	Review	1. greeting
	(1) rhythm	10 min.	today's theme (introduction to new words/expressions)	Main Activity	2. song, chants, or another type
	(2) picture book			① introduction	3. confirming the aim of the lesson
25 min.	electives:	20 min.	activities for getting familiar with new expressions	② getting familiar with...	
	(3) English conversation			③ game and conversation	
	(4) story	5 min.	cooling down & activities for connecting to the next lesson	Looking back	4. (observation: 2, 3, or 4 activities inclusive of listening quiz, chants, game)
(5) activities for self- expression	greeting				
10 min.	common:	2 min.	summary & greeting		Looking back.
	(6) game activities				5. fill in the card for looking back
	greeting				6. greeting

Among the others, Elementary School Attached to the Faculty of Education, Kumamoto University (2011) presents a large number of lesson plans. Teaching procedures in them vary, with some frequently used procedures, such as starting with singing a song and reviewing the words and expressions from the previous week, and ending with looking back and a question-answer activity between the teacher and each student.

All these four start with greeting and end with greeting. Kan and Omuta City Meiji Elementary School (2012) also has confirmation of the aim of the lesson with students at the beginning, which is now seen at a lot of schools, conducted in Japanese, and this school and Akita (2011) commonly include looking back at the end of the lesson. As for the main activities, Yoshida (2008) and Akita (2011) set up similar steps from introducing new words and expressions to familiarizing students with them. On the other hand, Ogawa (2006) divides teaching procedures into steps or electives, according to the types of teaching material. A difference from other writers is that a picture book and a story are always included either as a compulsory or an elective activity. The use of a picture book in a beginning session is for getting familiar with English rhythm and patterned expression, and the picture book in the main part of a lesson is for practicing and performing with a song, chants, or a story in the form of a drama, a picture-card show, or a toy theater. Kan and Omuta City Meiji Elementary School (2012) follows all the tasks and games in *Hi, friends!*

As for teaching methods, the analysis of the books reveals three major findings. First, there is almost no mention or arguments by the writers about the major methodologies for elementary school students. Second, most teachers use traditional methods of songs, chants and games. Third, there are some writers who are against a certain common practice. Fourth, only Yoshida (2008) has a section for expanding a variation of activities in each step in a lesson.

(1) The major methodologies

Most books do not mention or discuss the major methodologies referred to by Japanese researchers, such as Higuchi, Oshiro, Kunikata, and Takahashi (2010) and Oka and Kanamori (2012). They commonly describe five methodologies, dealing with their theoretical bases and classroom activities: 1) Total Physical Response; 2) The Natural Approach; 3) Communicative Language Teaching; 4) Task-based Instruction; and 5) Content-based Approach. Another well-known methodology is a story-based approach often discussed by researchers working outside Japan (e.g., Brewster and Ellis 2002).

Exceptional among the writers is Ogawa (2006), who mentions another approach termed the Lexical Approach by Lewis (1993, cited in Ogawa 2006: 13) and a collection of 96 English expressions developed by Matsuka (referred to by Ogawa 2006: 13) and named “Eikaiwa Taiso” (English Conversation Physical Exercise). Most elementary school teachers in this country have not received any formal instruction in teaching methodologies for elementary school English unless they took a methodology course at a graduate school or another formal occasion such as a study program for in-service elementary school teachers. A methodology course has not been set up by the government in the undergraduate elementary school teacher’s certificate program, neither as a compulsory course nor as an elective course in the program, as English has not been a school subject. This situation may well have affected lack of discussions on major methodologies by elementary school teachers.

However, characteristics of some methodologies can be traced in the writers’ approaches. First, getting students familiar with set dialogues, as in Elementary School Attached to the Faculty of Education, Kumamoto University (2011) and Kan and Omuta City Meiji Elementary School (2012), might be identified as an embryonic stage of Communicative

Language Teaching in the sense that ample time is given to verbal exchanges among students themselves. However, it does not show the features of this approach as described by Finocchiaro and Brumfit (1983, cited by Richards and Rodgers 1986) and addressed in language acquisition programs. For example, in Communicative Language Teaching, “the teacher cannot know exactly what language the students will use” and “the target linguistic system will be learned best through the process of struggling to communicate” (1986: 67-68). On the other hand, classroom activities for getting familiar with set dialogues in *English Language Activities* are often thoroughly controlled by the teacher, in a specific order of teaching procedures, with the students’ verbal behaviors pre-determined by the teacher. Furthermore, if I understand Communicative Language Teaching correctly, the teacher’s introduction of a certain group of language items could precede or follow students’ communication activities, but the former seems to me to almost always precede the latter in *Foreign Language Activities*. This may be related to the fact that students have not learned a lot of words and expressions with which they might cope with a new communication activity without any formal instruction preceding it.

Another feature commonly present in the same group of schools as the above is the use of story-related activities (which is partially because of the fact that a story is dealt with in “*Hi, friends!*”). It could be a motivator for the development of a story-based approach in the future. Elementary School Attached to the Faculty of Education, Kumamoto University (2011), which selected stories themselves, says that playing a drama had been very motivating to 4th graders (2011: 24).

(2) Songs, chants and games

Common use of these traditional methods, together with rich collections of materials, suggests that the methods have been well explored in the area of *English Language Activities* and that focus has been placed on experiential enjoyable classroom activities and on getting familiar with sound and prosodic features of English.

(3) Disputes against a common practice

Kato and Sano (2006) argue against learning English through drilling. According to them, learning should be purposeful to children, deriving from their own wish to do something. “In order to educate children to be able to use and speak English, the language should be introduced along with their lives and activities” (e.g., making things), as “any expressions of a language are used in such contexts” and thus “there is a reason for using English there” (2006: 87). Kato and Sano’s step-by-step lesson planning in each unit takes the form of a series of imaginary verbal exchanges between the teacher and the children. They plan a mixed language use for the teacher (e.g., a Japanese expression followed by an equivalent English expression) so that it could be easier for teachers to develop their verbal behaviors in English in the classroom. This is related to the greatest importance placed by them on the major role of Japanese homeroom teachers.

A question arises whether and how children can learn to use the kind of utterances in the lesson plans in the book. The imaginary children’s utterances are all in English. For example, in order to introduce how to make an origami item, students are expected to say, “What color do you like? Red? Yellow? Blue?”, “First, do this.”, “Right.”, “OK, good, perfect.”, “Next, go like this.”, “No, no. Hold it like this.” and “Turn it over, please.” (2006: 61).

Koizumi (2011) is also against the type of pair and group work that has been very commonly practiced in Japan by having children practice and use set dialogues, if it is merely based on their repetitive drilling and if acquisition of a given set dialogue has become a purpose in itself. According to Koizumi, children’s communication activities should be

conducted primarily with the teacher rather than with their fellow class members. He says, “Let us use a pair or group work only where children really want to ask their fellow members about something and the obtained information is meaningful to them” (2011: 87).

(4) Expanding a variation of activities

Yoshida (2008) offers helping hands to those teachers who think of only one activity type for a given purpose of learning or a limited inventory of activities, by presenting the basic pattern and some other instructional ideas. For instance, for the exchange of “How are you?” and “I’m fine, thank you.” he shows six patterns (e.g., exchange between the teacher and all students, pair work, rhythmic learning with a CD or clapping hands). This can be defined as an alternative approach to teacher development in Freeman’s terms (1982). The approach is to encourage teachers to be engaged in practical experimentation in the classroom. Yoshida intends also to expand students’ language to respond to “How are you?” by introducing several expressions for the “I’m....” pattern (e.g., I’m sleepy) and some “good” or “bad” patterns (e.g., “Pretty good.” and “Not so good.”). In conjunction with this, Kan and Omuta City Meiji Elementary School argues that students should be encouraged to say things, according to their own feelings and ideas (2012: 25).

3.4 Teacher talking to students in English

In the field of elementary school English teaching, Halliwell (1992) encourages teachers to conduct activities with simple phrasing while making use of actions and facial expressions. By offering sample teacher words and actions for a paired reading activity, she invites elementary school teachers of English as a foreign language to a greater use of the target language in the classroom. Slattery and Willis (2001) offer a rich collection of sample instructional languages, from phrases to be used in different phases of a lesson (e.g., how to start or end a lesson, and how to organize the classroom) through those usable for various instructional functions (e.g., directing, turn-giving, explaining and demonstrating) to sample talks about particular topics. Among these aspects of the teacher’s target language use, the topic talk can be most enlightening if the teacher is concerned mainly with using the target language for classroom management or organizing pupils’ activities.

The writers of the resource books are oriented toward helping elementary school teachers to enrich their English in their own manners. Exceptional among them is Kan and Omuta City Meiji Elementary School (2012). The school presents a total of 70 lesson plans (35 for 5th graders and 35 for 6th graders) that were written along with the teaching units of *Hi, friends!* in order. The same patterned verbal exchanges between the teacher and the students are used in every lesson plan, for opening and ending each lesson, as shown in the following extracts from the first lesson plan.

children’s activity	homeroom teacher’s support and evaluation
Hello, Mr. (Ms.) ～.	Hello, everyone.
I’m fine, thank you. How are you?	How are you today? I’m fine, thank you.
Thank you very much.	That’s all for today.
Good bye, Mr. (Ms.) ～. See you.	Good-bye, everyone. See you next time.

In addition to these patterns, some lesson plans collectively contains a small number of teacher utterances in total (e.g., “Now, first group is A.”, “Let’s start.”, and “Very good.” to be used in a lesson for drama presentation). These

observations suggest that teachers have learned to use the utterances in a confident manner, perhaps oriented mainly toward patterned dialogues. Lack of discussion on teacher English in this book would make it hard to confirm this, but it might be likely that the homeroom teachers of this school talk to students in Japanese, together with some instructional language items that they have learned in English. If so and it applies also to other schools, teachers need to further explore their use of English in the classroom.

Two writers recommend mixed use of Japanese and English to Japanese homeroom teachers. Kato and Sano (2006) argues that, although elementary school teachers seem to be resistant to mixed language use, “code switching, or code mixing, is now regarded as natural” to people like Japanese returnee students, and no lower-secondary English teachers use either English or Japanese exclusively. Therefore, it should be a characteristic of (our) new method of having Japanese homeroom teachers as the main teacher in the classroom (2006: 13-14). Each lesson description presented by Kato and Sano shows a series of the teacher’s and children’s imaginary utterances and their verbal exchanges. The following is from one of their lesson descriptions. The Japanese expressions in the parentheses, which are equivalent to the English preceding each, are from the lesson description and the English in square brackets is my translation of the Japanese preceding it.

Teacher	Children
Is the salad ready? (サラダはできたかな?)	Yes./No. (はい。/ いいえ。)
じゃ[Then], Let’s eat the salad! (サラダを食べよう!)	Yes, let’s eat. (はい, 食べよう!)
Is it good? (いい味?)	Yes, very good! (はい, とてもおいしいよ。)
おいしいは delicious とも言うよ。 [We can say also “delicious.”.]	Delicious! Delicious! (おいしい。おいしい。)

(Extracted from Kato and Sano 2006: 30)

Akita (2011) gives those elementary school teachers who are not good at speaking in English these two pieces of advice: 1) “Don’t aim at using perfect sentences and pronunciation.” and 2) “Basically use Japanese, with as much English as possible mixed with it.” Places where a sample dialogue between the teacher and the students shows up are in Akita’s description of how to start and end a lesson (2011: 19-23) and how to conduct a game or quiz (which is contained throughout the book), as in the following imaginary and exemplary dialogue in a color-related game.

T: (pointing to the left hand set of cards on the board) Where do you want to open?
S1: Red circle and Yellow triangle, please.
T: OK. Let’s open. Oh, it’s a rabbit. (pointing to the right hand set of cards) Where do you think the rabbit is?
S2: Blue heart and Purple square, please.
T: Here? Let’s open. Oh, I’m sorry. It’s a panda.

(Extracted from Akita 2011: 51)

Another place in Akita’s book (2011) which shows teacher English is in each lesson plan in the book. The teacher English there is also instructional language for various functions (e.g., “What’s this?” for checking the learning of new words, T’s questions for reviewing or practicing a set dialogue, “Good job!” and “We did it!” for praising and “Oh,

no!,” “Don’t mind,” “One more time,” and “From the beginning.” for encouraging students). It is worthy to note that “Don’t mind.” is used here but usually the situation requires instead “Don’t worry about it.”

Koizumi (2011) shows an approach to teacher English which is more communicative and instructive. He encourages teachers to have children listen to their talk and, for this purpose, he presents a list of sample utterances in each teaching unit. The collection may well be helping hands for those teachers who would like to develop not only a better way of conducting their instruction in English but also a greater ability to act as a communicator with children, inviting them to a new topic, or new teaching content, by raising questions and rephrasing children’s answers, like in the following example.

What color do you feel today?
Gray? Why?
Oh. You forgot your homework.

(Extracted from Koizumi 2011: 20)

This type of teacher talk in response to a student’s, or some students’, reaction to the teacher’s question is for communication between the teacher and the students rather than for the teacher to organize an activity to let it go, and it suggests a spirit of “topic talk” in Slattery and Willis’ terms (2001).

Another domain of the teacher’s use of English in the classroom is related to the teacher’s story telling skills. One example is the teacher’s casual talk about something from his/her daily life. In a lower-secondary school classroom I saw the teacher starting her lesson with her informal talk about a big snowfall on the previous day and how her children helped her to get out of her car which had a lot of snow on it. Elementary School Attached to the Faculty of Education, Kumamoto University (2011) includes this type of teacher story telling. It is the activity of listening to an ALT’s one-minute story, which is exemplified in the following talk:

At the weekend, the weather was fine, so I opened the windows and cleaned my house. I like cleaning. Do you like cleaning? First I used the dust cloth and then ...

(Extracted from Elementary School Attached to the Faculty of Education, Kumamoto University 2011: 20)

Another well-known story-telling type of teacher talk is called “oral introduction,” or, in its newer term, “oral interaction,” which is used to introduce the content of a new passage in the textbook. This type of teacher talk was not found in the books reviewed, perhaps because the current program never introduces a written passage to students.

3.5 Views on children and their learning process

It is likely that teachers base their teaching practice occasionally on their daily classroom observations on their students’ reactions, tendencies, and problems and successful attainments. More systematic approaches to students’ learning factors and their learning process can be seen in Ogawa (2006) and Koizumi (2011).

Ogawa (2006) points out ten characteristics of 5th and 6th graders in classes of *English Language Activities*. Among them are their shyness in making a big voice, and singing and dancing, and their interest in reading and writing and in

performance types of activities such as playing a drama and telling a story with picture cards. He mentions also the usefulness of Show and Tell to cultivate the students' ability to express themselves.

Both Ogawa (2006) and Koizumi (2011) emphasize the importance of listening activities, arguing against production-oriented teaching approaches. In their books one can see these writers drawing on academic knowledge as held by researchers: for Ogawa, the concepts of input and output and the importance of ample language input to be offered to the students; and for Koizumi, views on first language acquisition and its association with second language acquisition by elementary school students. If my understanding of Koizumi's approach is correct, the kind of language items which will be eventually needed for students to talk about a given topic are skillfully integrated into teacher talk, with students' listening activities given primary importance in the process of acquiring the verbal ability for communication.

It is worthy to note here that Halliwell (1992) refers to "children's ability to grasp meaning" as one of the characteristics they have already well developed and bring to the classroom. She argues that in order to activate this ability the teacher can "make full use of gesture, intonation, demonstration, actions and facial expressions" and that s/he should not "try to 'pin down' understanding too precisely" (1992: 3-4). She points out also children's "great skill in producing meaningful language from limited language resources." (1992: 3-4), which, I think, is a precious and beneficial message for the future implementation of English as a school subject in this country.

4. Concluding remarks: For further steps toward English as a school subject

The books reviewed in the present study are full of thoughts and ideas gained from the teachers' own practical explorations. Their approaches are diverse in focus and in all the aspects of teaching practice examined in this study. I hope that the creative nature of teacher's own explorations will be supported and maintained for the future establishment and implementation of English as a school subject. In addition, it is desirable that a collection of teacher resource books are available to elementary school teachers at their schools so that they may further develop their classroom teaching.

There are some issues extractable from this collection of books in order to move toward English as a school subject. First, focus on language syllabuses and language practice might lead to a single minded orientation toward language acquisition for the development of communicative ability. This, in turn, might bring an emphasis on teaching knowledge about English in Yoshida's (2008) terms. It is in these hypothetical contexts that a holistic and global objective like in Elementary School Attached to the Faculty of Education, Kumamoto University (2011) is worth maintaining and that some methodologies in their embryonic states, such as Thematic Teaching, Communicative Language Teaching and Story-Based Approaches, should be further explored.

Second, there are some unexplored areas which need to be developed in pursuit of a language acquisition program. One is to gain a more theoretical basis for classroom teaching by learning about the major methodologies and by discussing where songs, chants and games should be placed in the future in light of the importance of experiential learning and the sound aspect of English. The other is to learn to explore students' own learning process and what language acquisition or language

learning is like, as some of the books reviewed in this study show classroom activities fairly controlled by the teacher, with planning for classroom teaching becoming more and more systematic. As for set dialogues, for instance, it may be pleasant for teachers to see their students conversing with each other, relating positively to their fellow students and using a learned set dialogue. Such behaviors of children may further be regarded as indicative of a development of “the foundation of communication ability” (from the MEXT objective statement). Learning to use a collection of set dialogues is better than a mere possession of the pattern of “Hi, how are you?” and “I’m fine, thank you.” Learning and using a language, however, is more than that.

It is suggested in this study that the matter of teacher talk is an area which has been explored in the direction of enriching the teacher’s own English. This is shown, for example, in the lists of teacher utterances presented by Ogawa (2006) and Koizumi (2011). The teacher’s fluency in English can make it possible for the teacher to make a richer language environment for the students in the classroom. There might be classrooms where only the target language items (words and expressions) are used both by the teacher and the students. It surely is necessary to improve the situation. If teachers can develop their own English, they will be likely to develop their own views of language learning, which could better affect their classroom teaching.

Notes:

(1) A final report written by the Education Rebuilding Implementation Council is available at:

<http://www.kantei.go.jp/jp/singi/kyouiku/houkoku/honbun0131.pdf>; and

The English Education Reform Plan is presented in English at:

http://www.mext.go.jp/english/topics/_icsFiles/.../1343591_1.pdf

(2) The MEXT assessment points for *English Language Activities* are written on Page 21 in the paper presented at:

http://www.mext.go.jp/component/b_menu/nc/_icsFiles/afieldfile/2012/08/07/1292899_01_1.pdf

(3) Time-related practicability of a foreign language program is hardly ever discussed in this county, and I am aware of only one Japanese book which mentions something related to one of the five models by Johnstone (1994), namely, “encounter.” The book is Oka and Kanamori (2012). They say, “Elementary school foreign language activities (English teaching) can be said to be an encounter program which affects children’s attitudes toward foreign language learning and toward other cultures” (2012: 73).

(4) The objective of *Foreign Language Activities* is available at:

http://www.mext.go.jp/a_menu/shotou/new-cs/youryou/eiyaku/gai.pdf

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