



One can express the development of the English language education at Sophia Junior College (hereafter SJC) briefly by saying that there has been a shift from “classes where the English language was taught directly” to “classes taught using the English language”. This shift of policy was based on several suggestions formulated by SJC faculty working groups that met during the early 2000s for scrutinizing a variety of proposed reforms.

1. Some historical details of English language education at SJC

SJC started holding classes in the spring of 1973. The English education at that time was based on a curriculum that reflected the various strong points of three methodologies: the grammar with translation method, oral language educational methods, and direct educational methods. More



picture①

specifically, 1) courses in English Grammar and English Composition and English Reading A constituted the grammar with translation component; 2) teachers whose first language was English taught Oral English in the SJC classrooms (picture ③), along with frequent use of the language laboratories pictured in ②; 3) native English speakers taught English Reading B (picture ④); 4) the SJC president himself



picture②

team-taught a required class in English Pronunciation (picture ①). Among the specialized elective courses offered were the History of England and the History of the English Language, taught by teachers whose first language was English. Thus, the required courses related to English language acquisition occupied a high ratio of the overall curriculum at the beginning of SJC. (Translator’s

note: Because of space limitations, the Japanese original had to omit many important details of curricula and changes.)

However, a new curriculum was designed by the faculty members in response to various

changes in Japanese society. This new curriculum was implemented in stages, starting from the 2003 academic year. The changes in Japan's educational situation that affected SJC included a revision of the curriculum guidelines for junior and senior high schools, more variations in the entrance examinations, a broader diversity in the English and Japanese proficiency of the students entering SJC, and a widening variety of career choices for SJC graduates. In the revised curriculum, most of the previously required courses were abandoned according to the minimum essentials policy. New and remaining courses were rearranged to facilitate the achievement of English ability levels that corresponded more to the needs of individual SJC students.



picture③

2. A change from “classes that taught English language” to “classes that taught some content or skill using the English language”

In the new curriculum, the English language course components included the required courses and the semi-elective courses; the required English language courses were available in an organized sequence that extended over the four semesters. The SJC students were divided for the required English language courses according to the results of a level-placement test administered just after entrance and again after the second semester. These required courses in English had a common set of contents for each semester; these contents were taken from the guiding principles of Jochi Gakuin. The semi-elective English courses had the common title of English skills courses. Various courses at three different proficiency levels were offered. These included courses aimed at various special interests of students and courses that fit various career choices. Some courses in various subjects were opened that had Basic Level versions followed by Advanced Level continuations. Specific content courses taught in English included Cultural Anthropology, Visual Rhetoric, Global Literacy and Social Justice, and Acquisition of a Second Language. In 2005, to simplify each student's selection of her courses, SJC introduced four special groupings of courses that might match a student's career choice. (Translator's note: Confusingly, these groupings are called courses in syllabic Japanese.) The four original course groupings were as follows: Understanding Different Cultures, English and



picture④

American Literature, Language/Linguistics Studies, and Teaching English to Children. The name of the fourth grouping was changed in 2010 to reflect the actual situation that some SJC student volunteers were helping local residents holding non-Japanese citizenship to improve their Japanese language skills, while others were helping local primary schools and kindergartens to teach English language as student teachers. Some courses in teaching Japanese as a foreign language were added to the renamed category, which is now called Language Teaching. If a SJC student can pass a suitable number of designated classes in one grouping, she will receive a certificate of completion of that grouping along with her SJC diploma.

3. English in Action – Independent Study of English at SJC

From 2005, a program for independent English study has evolved with the overall title English in Action. The purpose of this program is to create many on-campus and



off-campus opportunities for SJC students to use living English. Picture ⑤ shows one presentation of a home-made skit in English. All English Day requires the students in each section of the required English courses to prepare and present such a skit. Picture ⑥ shows some results of the English Poster Project (formerly called the English Bulletin

Board) that students in each section of the required English courses should
 picture⑤ create as a group work project: identifying a topic, finding evidence, and constructing the final poster. English Café Luncheon gives eager SJC students a chance to enjoy conversations in English during the lunchtime period. The available assets for improving one’s English are expanding to include reading an English in Action website or interacting with e-learning websites. The special characteristic of the
 picture⑥ English in Action program is cooperation between out-of-class activities and regular curriculum activities so that SJC students can become autonomous English learners.



4. The improvement of English education at SJC through service learning

The above-mentioned independent educational training for English reaches into the activities of some student clubs/circles that are related to English education or volunteer work. The SEA (Sophia English Association), for example, started to sponsor an annual English public speaking contest for the SJC President's Trophy only a few years after the junior college started. The BTC circle (literally Baby Teaching Circle; the word 'baby' here means a small child) continues English teaching activities in local nursery schools, kindergartens, and primary schools.

In 2008, SJC was selected by the Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology to receive an award for Good Practice (GP) in supporting students. The title of the awarded program was "More Comprehensive Organization of Student Support by Service Learning". This grant allowed the creation of the Service Learning Center shown in picture ⑦. In the service learning center activities, the

earlier efforts of the family teacher volunteers and similar activities could be further developed. SJC students had taught conversational Japanese and tutored other school subjects to foreign families living nearby. The SJC students could learn how to teach in on-campus classes and practice what they had learned in volunteer



picture⑦

activities on-campus or off-campus. The theory and the practical experiences would feed each other to improve the local activities of teaching English or Japanese or tutoring school subjects.

Furthermore, classes that are needed to acquire the qualification to be an English teaching advisor for primary school students were opened. The recent syllabus makes clearer and easier to understand the connections between certain academic classes and the service learning activities. A block of time in the weekly day and hour schedule of SJC is dedicated to service learning classes and activities. Overall, a great deal of assistance is now available to develop such educational activities.

Moreover, starting in 2009, SJC has been funded by Jochi Gakuin in a program to guarantee the continued high level of Sophia education through educational innovations. The SJC program has created a required English program that reflects the guiding principles of the Sophia foundational spirit in ways that treat content seriously and promote deeper self-expression. The spring of 2011 will see the publication of a pilot edition of a support publication called English Essentials. The full-time SJC teachers wrote this publication jointly for use in classroom-related activities.