



Japanese junior high school students on a Tokyo street.

TEACHING COMMUNICATION

August 16, 2017

Charlie Bell: Yeah and it's- it's- and that's something they teach, isn't it? That's what (Yeah) these juku cram schools teach. (That's right) How to- it's not how to- it's not knowledge (learning) it's how to pass tests.

José Cruz: Yeah that's right. That's right. That's right. (It's it's ridiculous) And and that just couldn't- it just creates a complete mindset that is separate, that is the opposite of learning language for communication. OK, I said my thing and I should probably ask you. I said my thing that out of many of the things that I would change, I would choose the one easiest and most implementable thing to change which is to hire English teachers that actually could speak English. And I'm not even (Yeah) talking about changing the curriculum. Of course that (And) needs to be changed and...

Charlie: And it doesn't need to be native speakers.

José: So so- And most importantly it shouldn't be native speakers. It shouldn't (OK Yeah) be native speakers.

Charlie: So Japanese that can speak English.

José: Now that was my thing. What's your thing? What would you choose as the one most implementable but effective change that you could make in the English education system in Japan?

Charlie: Uh I would- Personally I would remove the focus on- You know **because** they start off at junior high school a lot of them have never had really any experience with English. What I'd do is take the focus on grammar away and just start from you know basics. You know grouping things and matching things and pictures, and you know, getting people

to say stuff. The focus on grammar is so unnatural. It's an unnatural way of learning I think. You know these are the rules of how to speak, now speak. (Mm) It should be about trying to speak, you know using- Uh I don't- It's too difficult to explain.

José: No, I I understand but the- (I don't agree with) Taking away the grammar focus.

Charlie: Yeah I mean, they go they come in at junior high school level, and they they are just exposed to rules. It's like, (Mm) this is the rule, this is the rule, this is the rule.

José: And that's where a lot of that grammar focus comes from. it's the entire tradition in junior high school: laying down rules, getting kids to memorize the rules and getting kids to regurgitate the rules. It's so junior high school. (Yeah) It's it's ridiculous.

Charlie: And it's just it's- just there's- and it and it gives them the the idea that's there's only one way. Which is- you know, it's demoralizing and then if you don't get it right you know you don't get points. But then you know just because **you haven't you know you haven't- you haven't** formed the grammar correctly doesn't mean that (Not at all) you know that you're not a good communicator or whatever.

José: And that's- just to get back to this article (Yeah sorry) That's an important thing to remember. No it's OK (Mm) that's an important thing to remember. These kids scored zero on a writing section but we still don't know anything, there's nothing in here in here as a statistic about their **communicative** skill.

Charlie: Well, what (But) do you think?

José: I think, because this is my experience at (Mm hmm) the university. The university gives me a whole bunch of different classes that are levelled. And they go from supposedly top level "A" to bottom level "E". Now in my personal experience, because I teach communicative, fluency-based um speaking classes (Yup) sometimes I get these A-level kids that are worthless at speaking, cannot communicate- although they're really good at taking a test (Yeah) and on the other hand I get supposedly a super low level class, and it turns out these kids are **a blast** they're so much fun, they have interesting ideas. And their their grammar is completely screwed up, but they got great ideas, and I love speaking to them.

Charlie: They'll give it a go.

José: They will. (Yeah) So these kids that scored zero, they're being told early on, when they're 14, 13 years old, "you're a zero". But it might be (Mm) They might actually- don't even know that they're hiding it. They're hiding true English skill but the **ministry** the way they grade doesn't uh think it's

important- because there's nothing in here about communicative skill. Because of course the ministry doesn't care if you have any communicative skill. They will say, "Oh it would be nice if you did, (Well they're) but really we want writing and reading".

Charlie: The headline now nowadays, if you go on their- on their website or read any information you know about their their strategy towards English teaching it's all about active learning and you know and don't worry about- don't worry about grammar and just give it a go and measuring on trying, you know it's all about "tried to" not "can do". But that's complete rubbish. That's not what they're- You know they they say one thing and do something completely different.

Word count	Time	Words/Min.
860	4:06	209.76

Pointers:

because: pronounced, "**KUHZ**" (1:03)

you haven't: an example of repeating instead of using filler words (2:10)

communicative: José should have said "**communication**" (2:31)

a blast: a slang word meaning, **a lot of fun** (3:05)

ministry: José is referring to the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (3:27)

Discussion:

Do you think your government does a good job of teaching English?

How would you teach English if you were a teacher?

What are the best methods for teaching or learning a language?

KYODO ARTICLE: "JAPANESE STUDENTS FAIL TO MEET ENGLISH TARGET"
<https://bit.ly/2ug0wzi>

IMAGE COURTESY CHRIS GLADIS
<https://www.flickr.com/photos/23054755@N00/2533479312/>

