

Textbook Review *Encounters on campus*

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Encounters on campus についての書評

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Michael P. Critchley (2018). *Encounters on Campus*, NAN'UN-DO publication, Tokyo. ISBN978-4-523-17871-2 C0082 ¥1900

The book under review here is part of a five volume book series for conversation classes at university level. The other books in the series are *Encounters Abroad* (2007), *Encounters Book 1* (2002), *Encounters Book 2* (2004), and *Business Encounters* (2013). Their author Michael P. Critchley has a long history of teaching and research publications in ELT. Critchley received his M.ED in TESOL from the University of Wollongong, Australia. He has been living in Japan for two decades and is currently teaching at Josai University.

The introduction to *Encounters on Campus* describes the purpose of this book as follows: “This [is a] low to mid-intermediate level textbook [that] prepares learners for task-based casual conversations centered around the theme of campus English.” The Japanese name of the book “すぐ使える英語コミュニケーション (Sugu tsukaeru Eigo komyunikēshon)” means “ready to use English communication”, which explains the concept of the series succinctly.

The main purpose of the book is to depict realistic on-campus conversations and help students to master them. The book is divided into four parts called “scenes”. Scene one deals with the first week at school, meeting new people and making friends, while scene two covers class-related students’ requests to the teacher. Scene three focuses on student life beyond campus, while the last scene is about organizing a school event. Each scene is further divided into three or four units with each of these units designed for two classes. Every unit is designed to include “Conversation focus”, “Language focus”, and “Talk time”.

At the end of each scene, the book requires students to review what they have learned with

the help of an “Extended Role Play”. In the “Teacher’s Book”, the solutions of all exercises can be found, while the “Students Book” features explanations, how to do these exercises. Pre-intermediate level students may not easily understand the conversations available on the included CD though it is reasonably easy for intermediate level students.

Scene one of the book fulfills its basic purpose but lacks substantial exercises for in-class work. The scene is suitable for a maximum of five or six classes, not eight as the author suggests. These units could be fewer in number since every other unit repeats the same kind of conversation. Unit 1 (Nice to Meet You) could have been merged with unit 2 (This is My Friend) because the setting of the conversation is almost identical. One gets the impression that the author did not put enough effort into diversifying the contents of the opening scene.

Scene two is basically everything that is done from the start of the academic year. However, it might have been better if some parts of scene two were merged into scene one. For instance, on the first day of my class, I told my students to write an email if they were going to miss a class, yet in the book this topic appears only in unit 7. Thus, most units make sense in themselves but are often either too narrow in focus or come too late, i.e. they are out of tune with the flow of campus life. Do not all teachers encourage students to ask questions from the first class onwards? Therefore, it would have been much better if units 7, 5 and 6 were incorporated as units 2, 3 and 4 respectively. Further problems with the current order make it look like some units were added just so the book would fit into a schedule of 28 classes a year.

Many basic things are repeated rather often. For example, making suggestions or recommendations about a place to visit or a place to eat out are very similar when it comes to conversational skills. The main thing for students to understand is that recommendations or suggestions are very similar for many topics. Students should learn how to apply these strategies in each of these situations themselves.

Scene three and four are quite practical since they help students acquire a proper understanding of English communication outside of the university. Scene four depicts many ideas for getting together and organizing things as well as accepting or rejecting ideas in a polite way. It might have been more fitting to the title “*Encounters on Campus*” if the event to be organized was an academic excursion or helping the teachers to organize some workshop or conference. But what exits, is learning the conversation skills to organize an off campus BBQ in scene four.

The author has undoubtedly put much effort into making the book easy enough for Japanese students to understand by adding Japanese language explanations, which, of course, help those with limited knowledge of English. The colorful design of the book, realistic images and various cartoon characters help students to be focused on the content of the book. It would have been

very helpful to teachers and students alike if the book would feature an index. On the whole, this book is reasonably clear with regard to its contents but at the same time, it leaves much to be desired as a stand-alone classroom textbook. However, a resourceful teacher can use this book in conjunction with other materials to teach students how to communicate effectively on topics in a variety of on or off campus settings.