

The New Crown Puzzle

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Over the years I have been involved with the team of people writing *New Crown*, I have found the process, in turn, stimulating, infuriating, and fascinating, but always absorbing. The emotions it evokes are similar to those I have when putting together a jigsaw puzzle. Putting a puzzle together requires strategies in finding shapes that fit and colors that match. Writing *New Crown* required similar puzzleish strategies.

One basic puzzling strategy is sorting the pieces into related colors. This might be compared to the process of creating a curriculum. There are the blue pieces — the sounds that need to be introduced and in this order. These are the white pieces — minimal vocabulary required by *Monbu (kagaku) sho*, the vocabulary thought important by *New Crown* writers, editors, and teachers, and the vocabulary required by the topic. Here is the pile of green pieces — the grammatical and structural items that need to be introduced. Finally, here are the brown pieces — the functional phrases that are necessary for daily communicating about basic topics and in common life situations.

Another basic puzzling strategy is to do the easy parts first, in particular the outside frame. In the *New Crown* puzzle, this is similar to writing the first draft. This process is actually quite fun. It goes quite quickly, and there is a sharp sense of accomplishment. “It’s done.” The sky is at the top, the earth is at the bottom, and trees and clouds line the edges. Well, not quite done. In fact, the entire center is empty.

The final strategy is piecing the center together. Start with a group of colors that seem to go together — for example the blues of what might be the sky. This is a harder, more painstaking process of carefully looking, comparing, trying, and changing. In the puzzling that went into writing *New Crown*, this process is the second, and third and thirty-first drafts

of the texts. The process covers all aspects of English.

In one section the goal might be to introduce students to the sounds of the plural “-s.” In the course of the passage, first we have to find words that naturally occur in the context. Also we can only use words that have already appeared in earlier lessons. Finally, the words must expose students to all three basic final “-s.” sounds, /-s/, /-z/, and /-es/.

Vocabulary and grammar are the most difficult of the language aspects to put together. The conditions surrounding them are rigid and every change in one section requires adjustments in the all following sections.

Regarding vocabulary. *Monbu (kagaku) sho* mandated words must be included. The short list of *New Crown* words (based on teacher comments and editorial thinking) must be included, and another list of preferred words should be included. Only words that would occur naturally in the context are allowed. A maximum of eight new words per page is ideal. All this, and a upper limit on the total number of words in the three volumes.

Regarding grammar, the goal might be the simple past, /-ed/, as in “she looked” and “he played.” I came to find out that the past might be simple but the writing was not. First, no irregular verbs are allowed. Unfortunately, these are the main work-a-day verbs of English. Second, only words that had already been learned in the present tense. Fair enough. But this latter condition takes us back to the ever changing vocabulary.

As the text emerges, as draft after draft after draft comes out, the words keep changing, which means all following chapters change and the English puzzle changes.

All in all, the *New Crown* puzzle is an invigorating process. One that is occasionally infuriating. One that is always a challenge.