



The ORTESOL Journal

Volume 29, 2012

Features

Secrets of Success: Saudi Student Voices

Politeness Is More Than 'Please': Teaching Email Requests

Facilitating Active Learning Through Action Research

Columns

In This Issue

Teaching Notes

Building a Bridge Between Instruction and Practice

Helping Students Through Difficult Conversations

Posing Questions and Calling on Students

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In This Issue

Melissa Mendelson & Jodi Weber ORTESOL Journal *Editors*

The ORTESOL Journal's 29th volume is the first from us, the journal's newest Co-Editors. We took over from longtime Editor Deborah Healey and Tom Delaney in the fall of 2012. We are forever grateful for their continued support and guidance as we navigated this project. With that said, we present the latest issue of the ORTESOL Journal. The articles herein are diverse in topic, but united in audience with all six features and columns focused on ELLs in higher education.

The issue begins with Donna Shaw's in-depth look at what strategies Saudi students use to succeed in American universities. Her research reminds teachers, advisors, and administrators that the existing research on international students is not complete until we consider the unique cultural and educational needs of each new group of students.

In our next feature, Emily Rine Butler addresses the need for pragmatic instruction to ELLs, while also sharing a technique for teaching pragmatics within a course. During a four-week summer language course, she spent two days working with students on politeness in emails. The takeaway from her work emphasizes that certain aspects of politeness must be taught explicitly and the results can be eye opening and relevant for students.

Marianne Stipe and Lora Yasen present an innovative project they created in order to improve the participation skills of their Japanese students. Using action research to

inform the process, the two teachers created a long-term performance project for their students that concluded with the students presenting on Japanese culture on community television. Their related findings, on how to more fully engage learners in a project, serve as a model for all teachers looking to boost participation.

Finally, we come to short teaching notes from teachers in the field. Beth Sheppard begins with her thoughts on connecting instruction to practice. She explains how she uses listening to raise students' awareness of their own oral production.

Maiko Hata takes us from the classroom to the office when she discusses how to work through difficult issues with individual students. Her insights as a former teacher-turned-advisor offer sound advice to anyone working with ELLs.

We end volume 29 with Laura Holland's suggestions for calling on students. She challenges teachers to move out of their comfort-zone and try new ways of calling on and talking to students during class.

Feel free to email or write for additional information regarding the articles available in this volume. We also encourage you to consider writing and submitting to the ORTESOL Journal. Please see the guidelines on the back page or visit the ORTESOL website. As always, feel free to contact the Editors with questions or comments.

Secrets of Success: Saudi Student Voices

Donna Shaw, University of Oregon

Introduction

In the fall of 2005, many intensive English programs were unexpectedly inundated with hundreds of applications from students in Saudi Arabia who wished to enter the United States in order to study English and then matriculate to U.S. colleges and universities. Consequently, schools across the United States found themselves educating and tending to the needs of unprecedented numbers of Saudi students. After some initial settling-in problems, some Saudi students were doing well while others were failing to thrive. In Saudi Arabia, students receive instruction from their teachers who deliver knowledge mostly via lectures. Students are expected to memorize the information. Grades depend solely on performance on final exams. Moreover, Saudi culture allows for negotiation: students know that if they plead with their instructors, they can be granted second chances or extra time to complete assignments. Given that some Saudi students adapt well to the culture of American classroom expectations whereas others fail, it is incumbent upon ESL instructors to consider the following questions:

- What strategies do Saudi students develop to succeed with their US studies?
- When these strategies are shared with peers, do they facilitate academic success?

In order to answer these questions, I embarked on a quest that included a series of interviews with 25 Saudi students over the period of a year. Of these 25 students, eight

were fully admitted into a university, eight were conditionally admitted to a university and were taking both English language and university courses, and nine were full-time English language students. Nineteen were undergraduates, and six were graduates. Seven were women. Each of these students had the chance to participate in a variety of interviews. As recommended by Stake (2000) and Gall, Gall, and Borg (2005) and for triangulation purposes, I conducted three types of interviews: semi-structured, photo-elicitation, and focus groups. In all, there were 61 individual interviews, six focus groups, and a grand total of 80 interactions between the students and myself. In addition, I kept a reflective journal, and I engaged in a series of on-going discussions of my findings, thoughts, and conclusions with my colleagues throughout the interview process and data analysis.

The Problem

At the time I began my research, there was a dearth of research about the Saudi experience in the U.S. and little was known of their strategies for succeeding in their new educational environment. While research has been conducted to understand the challenges and needs of international students in general (with Asian students as the central focus), little research has been undertaken to understand the Saudi Arabian experience. In addition, studies exist that determine how to support international students (again predominantly Asian students), yet there is little that focuses on Saudi Arabian students. While a sizeable sub-group of international students, Saudi students are under

-represented in investigations of international students. Inquiries have examined and described the educational system and environment in Saudi Arabia, and literature exists that investigates and portrays Saudi Arabian and Islamic culture, but very little has been done to capture the students' perceptions of how they are doing in the U.S. In addition, little is known about the success strategies Saudi students develop to reach their educational goals. Thus, there is an absence of Saudi students' voices about their experiences in the United States, the problems and challenges they face in their new educational environment, and the strategies they develop to succeed in their studies.

Literature

The literature that does exist is focused on international students. Studies that report on international students' perceptions and experiences tend to fall into two general types of studies. The older research (which was uniformly quantitative) tends to compartmentalize perceptions into general categories of problems. The later research is largely qualitative (and also tended to focus on problems) and includes student narratives to give voice to international student perceptions.

Not surprisingly, the literature on international students reports the problems and issues one would expect when studying in a different country, using a different language. Problems include difficulties associated with using English (Tompson & Tompson, 1960; Lin and Yi, 1997; Luzio-Lockett, 1998; Robertson, Line, Jones & Thomas, 2000; Qin & Lykes, 2006; and Li, Fox, & Almarza, 2007); perceptions of prejudice, racism, and discrimination in the U.S. (Lin and Yi, 1997;

Schmidt, Spears, and Branscombe; 2003; Lee & Rice, 2007); adapting to a different culture and a new academic experience while under strong pressure to succeed (Hull, 1978); financial problems; lack of contact with Americans; loneliness, homesickness, depression; and issues with adjusting to a new climate, food, and language (Hull, 1978; Lin and Yi, 1997). These findings were echoed in a large study conducted by Stafford (1980) with 53 international undergraduate students and 225 international graduate students. The study reported problems with homesickness, difficulty in obtaining housing, social relationships, using English, and problems with finances. Leong & Chou (1996), in a qualitative study, wrote that "students experience a whole range of

Little is known about the success strategies Saudi students develop to reach their educational goals.

adjustment problems including culture shock, language problems, isolation, and the loneliness of living in a strange country for extended periods" (p. 210).

Despite the difficulties that international students experience when studying in the U.S., they do succeed. Hull (1976) defined success as attaining educational goals and doing well in school. Boyer and Sedlacek (1988) defined success as an acceptable GPA and identified eight noncognitive predictors of international student success: (a) self-confidence, (b) realistic self-appraisal, especially concerning academic skills, (c) involvement in community activities, (d) knowledge acquired in the field, (e) successful leadership experiences, (f) long-range goals over short-term goals, (g) ability to understand and cope with racism, and (h) availability of a support person. Stoyloff (1996, 1997) examined the factors associated with academic achievement and noted that language proficiency and appropriate learning study strategies correlated with success-

ful academic performance (high GPA, large number of credits earned, and small number of withdrawals). While all students used learning strategies, the more successful students (those with higher GPAs) used strategies more often. In addition, the successful students regularly availed themselves of social and academic assistance. The more successful students managed their study time, spent time studying, prepared for tests, and made use of support systems (study groups, tutors, friends) (Stoynoff, 1997). A repetition of the importance of support communities is found in the work of Al-Sharideh & Goe, 1998; Faid-Douglas, 2000; Abel, 2002; and Tseng & Newton, 2002. Abel (2002) agreed that successful (defined by the ability to reach academic goals) international students should rely on support communities. He also recommended that international students develop study skills, practice time management, avail themselves of tutoring, and join study groups. (Abel, 2002). Finally, Faid-Douglas (2000) and Tseng & Newton (2002) recommended that international students build support systems and communities by expanding their world-views, asking for help when encountering a problem and increasing their proficiency in English.

Saudi Students: Problems and Challenges

When questioned about the problems and challenges they faced while studying in the United States, the Saudi students I interviewed echoed the literature. They reported that American classroom practices and culture—which include active classrooms, pair work, group work, frequent quizzes and exams, required attendance, constant homework, and self-directed learning—were different and challenging in their new environ-

ment. General sentiments included the following comments:

Student C (female, graduate): “Way classes are here is different. Relationship between teachers and students. Classes and grades don’t depend on one thing—in Saudi Arabia grades depend on exams.”

Student A (female, undergraduate): “Here there is a focus on group work; how students deal with teachers. The number of students in classes is different. In Saudi Arabia, teachers focus on saying what they want and then go. They don’t focus on students’ understanding. There are lecture hall types of classes.”

Generally class attendance is not rigorously focused on in Saudi Arabia.

Student D (male, undergraduate): “In Saudi Arabia, teachers give information directly; students keep information; that’s it—memorization with no application.”

Student J (male, undergraduate): “In the U.S., teachers give information and students must think; they must think critically.”

Another issue that many of the students commented upon was the lack of negotiation, which led to the perception that they were now in a system with arbitrary rules. For example, generally class attendance is not rigorously focused on in Saudi Arabia. If a student is ill and misses class or an exam, he or she speaks to the teacher and is excused for an absence or allowed to reschedule an exam. Things are usually negotiable. The students found quite the opposite to be true here. For example in the language program, an absence from class is not excused; if a student is not in class, the student is absent. If homework is due, it is due with no excuses. At the university, the final exam

schedule is established for the whole university. When an exam is scheduled, the date is not negotiable and there are no make-ups.

This set of circumstances posed problems for the students. Thirteen students (52%) said that they resented the rules of American classrooms and teachers, and they were frustrated by the absence of negotiation. Student A, a fully admitted, female university student, had a story to tell:

“Like I, this term, um there is one week where I was really sick and when I get sick, I can’t go anywhere. I can’t go to school . . . or do anything. And I had 3 midterms in one day, one midterm the second day and a paper the third day. I went to every instructor, and I told them that I can’t do it; I can’t do it. I am sick; I am tired and like . . . and they say it’s not my problem. Go and try with the other teacher. It was like, what could I do? And then my brother got sick, too, and then I was like, okay, I don’t know what should I do. Then I went back to my instructors, and I told them, okay, it’s not like because I told you. I have a recommendation form SHS [student health services]. So, you should be able to know that I have something and sometimes I just can’t do it. I can’t study; I can’t do anything. At least one exam, if it moves to the next day, and I have two midterms in each day, it will be much easier for me. None of my teachers would do that for me. And I had to take them, the three of them in one day. And I didn’t sleep for almost twenty—more than 24 hours.”

Student D (a male, undergraduate student) had a story about being in a different educational environment, too:

“So here’s the point. I mean, it’s just,

sometimes, it’s just like students do not have the time because lots of things. Especially for international students, if something happen back home, you will be just . . . I cannot do anything and no one will understand me on this point from here. My teachers, you have homework—you have to do it. You have exam—you have to take it. You have final—you have to come. So no one will understand me, what my situation is. Okay, I’m in a different environment. I have to go to my exam. I have to do my test. I was in the last week of studying . . . and my uncle, my wife’s father died. I told my instructor I have the same, like, the day after I have an exam, and I told her my uncle died, or my father-in-law died, and she said okay, okay. And after that I got my exam back; I got D. And I told her because of that. I got As in all the previous exams, and she told me, I cannot do anything for you. No help with that . . . When I was back home studying at the university, sometimes I faced problems and I talked to the instructor. He told me, “You are totally fine. You don’t want to come to the midterm, okay; it’s okay. I will give it to you another day. Like that. We just grow up in an environment like this, and now it’s totally changed.”

In addition to differences in classroom culture and practices, eight students (32%) mentioned how difficult it was to be away from home and family. This echoes the work of Lin and Yee (1997) who found that Asian students suffered from loneliness and absence of family and the work of Al-Banyan (1980), Haneef (1996), King-Irani (2004), and Nydell (2006) who described the closeness and interdependence of the family. When the students I interviewed were home, they were surrounded by family members who supported them. Here they are alone. As

Eight students mentioned how difficult it was to be away from home and family.

the students reported, “life is drastically different in the United States. One problem is homesickness” (Student H).

Another student added that being away from home is an important aspect of students failing their classes in the United States. While it can be an advantage to be so far away from family because of the freedom, “no one is watching,” it is also a problem because “most Saudis are exposed to many of the things they are not exposed to at home, such as girls, drugs, and alcohol.” Student O (male, undergraduate) also reported that experimentation with drugs and alcohol caused some students to fail. He said that “90% of those who failed did so because of drugs and alcohol. They have no background to make good choices.” Student O added that some Saudi men have a hard time trying to act like Americans with drinking.

In addition, Flaitz (2003) wrote that having a teacher of the opposite sex is a major hurdle that Saudi students must overcome. Al-Banyan (1980), Oliver (1987) and the Saudi Arabian Cultural Mission (1991) reported that segregation of the sexes is required in Saudi classrooms and is a difference with which students studying abroad must contend. Echoing the literature, the students I interviewed said that this was the first time they had women teachers and classmates. For women, of course, this was their first experience with men instructors and classmates.

While they adjusted, over time, to this difference, it was problematic for some of the students. Student X said that it was different to sit in a class with women teachers. “I felt awful for weeks; then it was okay. At first it was hard to have women in classes.

With time, things got much better.” This student added that he did not know how to talk to women and it made him uncomfortable. He had asked for a woman conversation partner so he could practice talking to the opposite sex.

Finally, another challenge the students faced in the United States is the amount of homework they must do here. Rather than studying and cramming for mid-terms and final exams, students reported that they needed to study every day to prepare for classes. Jeffra Flaitz’ (2003) book, *Understanding Your International Students*, reported the same thing. Using the library to do homework and meet with study groups was a unique experience for the students.

The students were asked how they defined success.

Saudi Students and Success

The students I interviewed tended to agree with the literature’s definition of success (Boyer & Sedlacek, 1988; Hull, 1976; Pederson, 1994; and Stoyhoff, 1996) in that a successful person receives good grades and is attaining his or her educational goals. They were also inclined to equate success with happiness through helping others or giving back to their country. During the interviews, the students were asked how they defined success and what it meant to them. Here are some of their answers to the question, What is success?:

Student N: “Being happy with the work I’m doing. Find a job when home—teach. Teach when home. Not happy about education there—want to get good education here and then teach.”

Student M: “Success means to be at the top of the mountain. It’s easy to get in but hard to stay there. To be at the top of the

mountain, you'll be like on top of everything. Happiness, and your education and everything. Your position in society, in certain field like in education, in everything. It's the same to be happy, is also the top of the mountain."

Student C: "I think that success means for me, future, improvements. I mean by improvement, improve myself and also the big goal for me to improve my country, especially in my major, chemical engineering. So, yeah, I want to be successful for this reason."

In order to receive a more complete idea of how the students I interviewed defined success, I asked them how they defined a successful student. In general, they said that a successful student is smart, goal oriented, motivated, hard working and focused, and is someone who can manage time well.

Saudi Students and Success Strategies

Time management is a success strategy mentioned in Stoyhoff's (1996, 1997) work. It was a strategy also discussed by almost all the students during at least one of their interviews as a way to successfully manage the multiple demands on their time. Along with managing their time, the students stressed goal setting and planning:

Student M: "Time management yes, and I think you have to set up some goals for yourself."

Student Q: "Set goals. Write everything down, and put on paper in front of me. To remind me of goals. Keep a reminder. Put on paper—1, 2, 3—what to do to reach goals."

Student A: "Noticing a goal, making a plan, then working toward it. The big thing is to go back to plan. Making a plan is easy, staying with the plan is hard. Look back at the plan and just do it."

The students saw time management as a sub-set of goal setting. They said that they would set a goal, focus on the goal, and plan. Time management was a tool in achieving the goal. The students said:

Student A: "Time management. Knowing when finals, papers, quizzes are due. I put them on a schedule and get the whole picture for the term. I decide which classes need the most time and divide up the hours. Look at weekly schedule and schedule out my time."

Student H: "Manage time with a calendar and notebook. I do 70% to 80% of my schedule—it helps a lot."

Student T "Because I have a shortage of time, I have to plan everything carefully. I mean I have to use my time efficiently."

Student I: "Organize time; don't postpone anything; plan ahead and prepare."

Time management, planning, and goal setting are closely associated with study skills and could be seen as examples of study skills. However, the students I interviewed separated and stressed time management, planning, and goal setting from study skills. This category encompasses doing homework, attending class, developing reading strategies, and reviewing. Here is what the students said:

Student U: "Focus and do homework. Don't be late to class and bring books."

Student O: "Always skim before reading so that you'll know what something is

about. Know what the professor thinks, what the professor wants. Understand class itself, how the professor organizes, how the books are written.”

Student K: “Don’t skip reading (do about every other one); go to lectures to prevent reading.”

Student B: “Study very good, immediately after class.”

Student G: “Use vocabulary cards for new vocabulary; read fast, outline when writing.”

Student P: “Prepare and be attentive/listen. Go home and review.”

Able (2002), Faid-Douglas (2000), Stoyhoff (1996, 1997), and Tseng and Newton (2002) wrote that study groups are another strategy that successful international students develop. The students I interviewed agreed and said that study groups serve two purposes. First, they allow students to share information. Secondly, study groups offer a community of support. Student N said, “Having Saudis here to meet with each week relieves the pressure.”

Several students mentioned that they try to meet Americans and make friends. Creating groups of Americans to interact with both helped their speaking abilities and gave them personal resources for help with writing assignments and other classroom tasks. Student A commented that “for me, I can learn more with people. For me parties help. Because I’ll have native speakers and I’ll have to talk, no other language than English.”

Learning about and taking advantage of resources is a success strategy that is

widely reported in the literature about international students (Abel, 2002; Al-Sharideh & Goe, 1998; Faid-Douglas, 2000; Stoyhoff, 1996, 1997; Tseng & Newton, 2002). Using campus resources is a strategy that all the students I interviewed used, as well. Resources ranged from places, such as the library, to people such as writing tutors, professors, and TAs. Student U put it very clearly:

“I have one strategy. It’s the simplest strategy. Ask for help. No, I have a lot of friends here, so I have a list and I have to match . . . I have that kind of problem, I have to call [name of person]. I have this kind of problem, so I just ask for help.”

Other students reported that they took advantage of help by going to teachers’ offices to ask questions; getting writing help from tutors in the Writing Center and the Learning Center; signing up for help at the math study table; and taking part in math review sessions before final exams. Students said that they “use everything: homework, math learning center, Collaborative Learning Center, Writing Center. Ask for help.”

At one time or another during the interviews, all the students stressed the importance of working hard. A major component of success, they felt, is hard work and persistence. The students said:

Student N: “Keep going. Keep trying.”

Student A: “I know that about myself. I can. I not just give up and say I can’t, I can’t.”

Student G: “You must study hard and be good in grammar, be good in listening, in speaking, in writing—not just take it easy.”

Student W: “My strategy is practice,

***“I have one strategy.
It’s the simplest strategy.”***

practice, practice—everything. Reading, writing, listening, speaking. Just practice and work hard.

Student F: “Walking the stairs—take one step at a time; focus on one step. Think I can do it”

Student H “Believe in success; if you don’t believe in yourself, you don’t do it. No one will help you if you don’t help yourself.

Saudi Students – Sharing Success Strategies

Finally, I asked the students if they shared their success strategies with fellow Saudi students, friends, and/or study partners. During the focus group, students answered questions

about support communities and if they shared their success strategies with other students. The over-

whelming answer to the questions was, “yes, yes, yes!” All students said that they shared success strategies with their peers and did what they could to support them with their studies and with general life events.

Specifics about the sharing of success strategies ranged from advising their fellow Saudi students about study skills and inviting friends to join study groups, to keeping sets of exams, notes, reports, and papers to share. There was an overarching tone of willingness to help others succeed. Student D told me that he tries to notice what someone does not know. “If you help someone without asking for a benefit, you’ll have benefits from God.” This student tended to share everything he knows. For example, he helped his fellow Saudis with computers, mid-term projects, and shared his experience. Other students said that they work together, help one another with vocabulary

acquisition and TOEFL strategies, and, most importantly, gave one another encouragement.

One important success strategy that students shared is recommending classes and professors. During the focus groups, students told me that they discussed instructors with their peers and made recommendations for particular classes. Student N pointed out that “if I had a friend who had an experience with [a professor], I’d ask him. I’d switch the class, too.”

In addition to sharing opinions about professors and recommending classes, the students had other success strategies they shared with their fellow Saudi students. Those mentioned include the following:

There was an overarching tone of willingness to help others succeed.

- attend all classes
- get advice for listening and speaking from teachers
- manage time

- study hard
- get good study materials/books for the GRE, TOEFL
- get writing help from the free tutors in the Learning Center
- do homework
- practice English
- be prepared
- take your education seriously

Additionally, the students reported that they formed support communities and shared their successful experiences. In the words of Student M, “I hope everyone get all As in all classes. What they need, paper any stuff that I’ve done. They need it, I give it to them.” Other students echoed his sentiments and said that they “share notes, tests, papers.” Student M added, “Everything that I have I give it to them. I say just go ahead. It will be easy A for you, just study.”

However, some students pointed out that their peers need to work also. It's a two-way street. The students contributed study tips and help as long as the recipient of the help used the strategies and helped him/herself, too. Student M was reluctant to continue to help someone if that person did not try to help himself. "But the one who not help himself, I will not help, so that's it. If you want to work, just show me that you want to work. Otherwise, I can't help you."

This sentiment was repeated when discussing study groups. Student G (male, undergraduate) pointed out:

"There are some rules. Anyone didn't follow the rules, they would not get help from us." "If we like say, we have review questions for the mid-term. And we say like hey guys, you section A, B, C, D. Anyone who didn't do it, like his section to solve the question, we not give him the whole work."

Thus, the students did develop success strategies, and they shared them with their peers, who found them helpful. However, the recipients of the help had to contribute.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it appears that the information I received from the Saudi students I interviewed dovetailed with the literature about international students in the areas of problems and challenges. These students also supported the literature concerning the strategies they developed to succeed. Now, one is left with the question, what does it all mean? What significance comes from conducting an in-depth study of the success

strategies of a group of Saudi students in the United States over a period of one year? The answer is that now Saudi voices are added to the experiences of international students, and it contributes to the body of knowledge about the experiences of a specific group of international students that have been under-represented in the literature. In addition, with a focus on the specific success strategies that Saudi students develop in order to reach their educational goals, more is known about how Saudi students, and international students in general, succeed and what success strategies they develop. As Tseng and Newton (2002) wrote, "How and why some international students experience their study abroad lives in positive ways is largely ignored in existing research" (para. 1). As

We can listen, create community and offer support.

more light is shed on the issue and Saudi students' voices are added to what is known about the problems and challenges that international students face

in their U.S. studies, ESL instructors can be better prepared to help them succeed in attaining their educational goals. The more we know about the experiences of Saudi students in the United States, the more we can focus attention on their success strategies.

Those of us working in language programs, colleges, and universities have the means of gaining a greater insight into our Saudi students and helping them reach their academic goals by understanding more about their experiences and the strategies they develop to succeed and thrive. We can support success by helping our students learn study skills and encourage their use. We can help our students set goals, track their progress in meeting their goals, and recognizing when goals are attained. We can explicitly teach time management, and we can explicitly teach American classroom culture and expectations. We can encourage interactions

between our Saudi students and Americans. We can organize study groups and help students access campus and program resources. Most importantly, we can listen, create community and offer support.

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Politeness is more than ‘please’

Teaching email requests

Emily Rine Butler, University of Oregon

Emails have become one of the trickiest genres of communication for students to master. As a hybrid genre exhibiting features of both spoken and written discourse (Crystal, 2001), it is often difficult to gauge the changes one needs to make depending on who they are addressing or what the context is for the email. In fact, as instructors, many of us have opened our email inboxes to find an email from a student that makes us cringe at its inappropriateness. Perhaps the student has demanded rather than asked politely for help, or perhaps the student has used such informal language as to wonder if they really meant to email you and not their roommate. In many cases, we may ignore such breaches of etiquette, viewing such behavior as symptomatic of the informal nature of the net generation or a lack of knowledge about the conventions of emailing in English.

As ESOL instructors, we are trained to be empathetic to the plight of students who may not have yet mastered the socio-pragmatic norms of English. And in most cases, the immediate consequences of such email behavior are small, if any. However, most individuals that an L2 learner of English will come into contact with during their university careers are not trained to overlook such pragmatic “flubs”. In fact, after being on the receiving end of such an email, some professors may simply refuse to reply to such “impolite” language and essentially write off the student as arrogant and insolent. Rarely, however, do we stage an intervention, although research has shown that without instruction, learners for the most part do

not acquire pragmatics on their own (Bardovi-Harlig & Mahan-Taylor, 2003; Bouton, 1988; Kasper, 1995; Rose & Kasper, 2003).

While students are often familiar with and capable of producing the linguistic forms of a request (which falls into the speech act category of *directives*) (Searle, 1976), one challenge in making requests in English is knowing the level of politeness one should use with a person. As in any sort of one-on-one conversation, relationships are negotiated using politeness strategies. A speaker uses these strategies to appeal to a listener’s *face*, which is the listener’s need to belong or feel involvement (positive face) as well as the listener’s need to feel respect or independence (negative face). The concept of ‘maintaining face’ describes strategies used to balance both positive and negative face in interaction, which involve the use of certain kinds of language. Personal style, culture, and status of speakers with relation to one another affect choice of politeness strategies. Therefore, in order for students to build awareness of making email requests, it is important to teach them what types of directives are appropriate given the relationships between the participants. Although the teaching of request strategies, or pragmatics in general, may seem daunting to teachers whose time and syllabi are often overstretched as it is, it need not be. This article presents additional evidence to support the need for the explicit instruction in pragmatics. It also illustrates one way to raise students’ pragmatic awareness of email requests through a workshop given to a group

of EFL students using their own emails as examples for analysis and change.

Teaching Pragmatics

Within the field of L2 pragmatics research, the issue of whether to and/or how to teach pragmatics to students has been oft discussed. In much of the early research in the field, many researchers sought to discover whether pragmatics needed to be taught explicitly, or whether pragmatics could be picked up implicitly while learning other aspects of a language. And, as the early research has shown, some aspects of pragmatics have been shown to develop implicitly. Studies have shown, for example, that learners are sensitive to the fact that different contexts require different communicative strategies that may vary according to differences in social power, status, or degree of imposition associated with a particular speech act (Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1986; Faesch & Kasper, 1989; Piirainen-Marsh, 1995; Takahashi & DuFon, 1989). In addition, some cross-linguistic influence may occur if the form-function mapping between the L1 and L2 are similar in similar social contexts (Faerch & Kasper, 1989; House & Kasper, 1987). However, cross-linguistic similarities between a speaker's L1 and L2 do not always guarantee success. In fact, even if students use politeness markers in their L1, that does not always mean they use those markers in the L2, even if a contextual situation in the L2 requires the same degree of sensitivity to social distance and power as in the L1 (Fukushima, 1990; Kasper, 1981; Tanaka, 1988).

While research has indicated that some pragmatic elements can be learned implicitly by learners, overwhelmingly studies have shown the benefits of *explicitly* teaching pragmatics (Bardovi-Harlig and Mahan-Taylor, 2003; Bouton, 1994; Kasper, 2001; Kubota, 1995; Tateyama et al., 1997; Wildner-Bassett 1994). In an online handbook on the teaching

of pragmatics, Bardovi-Harlig and Mahan-Taylor (2003) explain that one of the main reasons why the teaching of pragmatics is so important is that even as learners develop in areas of syntax or phonology, pragmatic abilities may not develop in parallel without direct instruction (see also Bouton, 1988; Kasper, 1995; Rose & Kasper, 2003). Furthermore, in another study by Bardovi-Harlig and Dörnyei (1997) about the pragmatic awareness of Hungarian and Italian learners of English, learners could more easily recognize utterances which were grammatically correct but were pragmatically inappropriate rather than the reverse. As Kasper (1996) notes about Bardovi-Harlig and Dörnyei's (1997) study, "This finding strongly suggests that without a pragmatic focus, foreign language teaching raises students' *metalinguistic* awareness, but it does not contribute much to develop their *metapragmatic* consciousness in L2" (n.p., *italics in original*). Therefore, Kasper (1996) recommends using pragmatic awareness-raising tasks in order to gain both the socio-pragmatic and pragmalinguistic knowledge of a particular act or event.

The type of awareness-raising task presented in this article focuses primarily on raising awareness of the pragmalinguistic forms used by English speakers when making requests over email at the university level. In describing the purpose of the pragmalinguistic task in the context of 'thanking' someone, Kasper (1996) writes the following:

A *pragmalinguistic* task focuses on the strategies and linguistic means by which thanking is accomplished - what formulae are used, and what additional means of expressing appreciation are employed, such as expressing pleasure about the giver's thoughtfulness or the received gift,

asking questions about it, and so forth. Finally, by examining in which contexts the various ways of expressing gratitude are used, sociopragmatic and pragmalinguistic aspects are combined. By focusing students' attention on relevant features of the input, such observation tasks help students make connections between linguistic forms, pragmatic functions, their occurrence in different social contexts, and their cultural meanings. Students are thus guided to *notice* the information they need in order to develop their pragmatic competence in L2 (Schmidt, 1993). (n.p.)

Participants

The students who participated in the workshop were part of a 4-week intensive study abroad program at the University of Oregon for Japanese students at Meiji University in Tokyo. During the program, students took courses in American Culture, University Skills, and Oral Communication, which were coupled with a homestay experience and several field trips. In the Summer 2011 session, 23 students participated in the program. For such classes as Oral Communication, the students are normally sorted into two classes according to higher and lower proficiency levels. However, for the University Skills and American Culture courses, the students are all together in one class.

Prep Work

The workshop on pragmatics took place in the University Skills class during the third week of the four-week program. After noticing what I would deem “inappropriate” language use in many emails by the students in the early weeks of the program, I decided to create an awareness-raising activity for the students in the form

of a workshop. In order to illustrate the differences between students' and expert speakers' understanding of socio-pragmatic norms in English, two days before the workshop, I emailed all 23 students of the Meiji Program and asked them to send me 3 emails, each for a different scenario meant to highlight how differences in power and status relationships can affect language use. For the expert speaker group, I emailed the Meiji Program faculty, the students' native English-speaking conversation partners, and several faculty colleagues in other departments around the university. In terms of response, 21 of the 23 students responded to my request, as well as 6 expert speakers of English. The scenarios emailed to the participants are listed below:

1. Write an email to your professor (Dr. Emily Butler) in which you ask her to clarify what the due date is for an assignment you have in her class. On the syllabus, it has one date, but you thought she told you a different date in class.
2. You are going to be a new student at the University of Oregon in the fall. You are interested in studying Computer Science and want to request information about the department. Email the department head (Dr. Emily Butler) to ask for information about the department.
3. You are planning to meet up with your friend later to work on a project for English class. You were originally supposed to meet her on Friday but you can only meet her on Wednesday this week. Email your friend (Cathy) to request a meeting time on Wednesday instead of Friday.

Once the emails were collected, I separated and coded the emails into groups according to scenario and English proficiency (i.e. English learners vs. expert

speakers). After looking at the recurrent elements used by the expert speakers of English in tandem with several sites providing email etiquette tips, I came up with a set of recurrent elements that the expert speakers of English used when writing emails, such as the type of greeting used or the salutation used, in addition to the directive language used. For example, below (Fig. 1) is an example of an expert speaker email response to Scenario 1 (see above).

As is illustrated in Figure 1, there were 4 main elements included in the emails of the expert speakers that were consistently used. First, the email begins with a formal greeting that includes the professor's last name and a title (Dr. or Professor). Second, when need-

ing to make a request of a professor, the expert speaker uses an *indirect request*, followed by a *reason for making the request*. Lastly, the expert speaker *thinks* the professor for considering the request. While the content of each email varied, each of these 4 elements was present in all of the expert speakers' emails for Scenario 1.

By contrast, the emails of the English language learners were qualitatively very different. Figure 2 below illustrates a typical student email response for Scenario 1.

While the student's email also included a greeting ('Dear. Dr. Emily'), the greeting itself was less formal than the expert speaker's greeting in Figure 2, referring

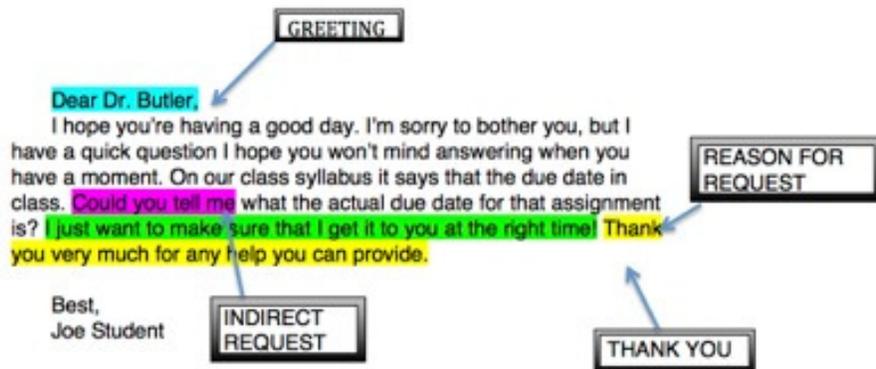


Figure 1. Expert speaker email: Scenario 1

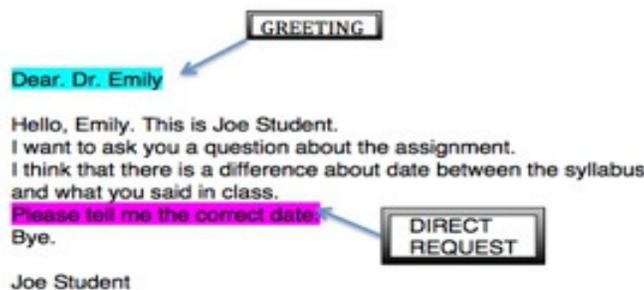


Figure 2. English learner email: Scenario 1

to the professor's first name rather than surname. Although the greeting itself is not 'wrong' per se, highlighting the differences between the choices expert speakers make and the students make can be a very powerful tool for raising pragmatic awareness and helping them realize more appropriate socio-pragmatic choices. Additionally, the student's email included directive language ('Please tell me the correct date'), although he or she used a direct request + hedge instead of the indirect request with a modal/semi-modal that the expert speaker used.

Teaching Directives Use in Emails

In order to increase students' pragmatic awareness of writing email requests, I presented two areas students need to understand: directive language and email etiquette. I chose to focus first on a general discussion of pragmatics, followed by what *requests* are and their relationship to *directives*; finally, I explained what the linguistic elements of a directive are. This gave the students a more fine-grained set of tools by which to evaluate their own emails in terms of directive use.

As previously mentioned, a *request* falls into the category of speech acts called *directives* (Searle, 1976). A directive is a phrase or a group of words that we use to tell or suggest to others what we want them to do. There are three main types of requests, which vary in terms of directness and level of demand: 1) direct (e.g. Give me a book!),

2) conventional indirect (e.g. Could you give me that book?), and 3) non-conventional indirect (e.g. You know, a book would really help me to study right now).

In constructing a directive, I explained that there are essentially three main parts: (1) *pronoun/subject*, (2) *main element*, and (3) *modifier*. The *pronoun/subject* refers to the pronouns or subjects used in making the directive (e.g. Could *you* give me that book?). The *main element* is the part of the directive that carries the main action or verb of the directive. As will be described later, the main element carries the main 'weight' for level of politeness in a directive, although many students mistakenly assume that the *modifier* carries the most weight. There are four types of *main element*, which are *imperatives* (e.g. Give me the book), *modals/semi-modals* (e.g. You *should* give me the book), *directive vocabulary* (e.g. It is *required* that you give me the book), and *hypotheticals* (e.g. *If* I were you, I *would* give me the book). Lastly, *modifiers* describe those words used to either hedge a directive (e.g. Could you *please* give me that book?) or intensify it (e.g. You *really* need to give me that book).

Once the students were given an overview of directive usage, I used this as a segue into the larger question of "What kind of request should I use?" and into having them discuss and work hands-on with their own emails. As a way to concretize the infor-

Which kind of request should I use?

- The directness of a request needed is determined by the *social power* and *distance* between the interlocutors, as well as *degree of imposition* involved.
- In education environments, teachers and advisors usually give *directives* to students, while students make *requests* of teachers and advisors.

Figure 3. Notes to remember requests

mation I presented about pragmatics and directive use, I provided two notes that they could try to remember (Figure 3).

Afterwards, I split the students into small groups and asked them to re-analyze the scenarios, but this time using some of the new terms we just learned in the lecture (Figure 4). Each small group was given 15-20 minutes to discuss before we discussed each scenario as a whole class for 15-20 more minutes. The whole-group discussion allowed for the entire class to benefit from the comments made by each smaller group about the types of language that should be used in each email scenario; it also allowed me to affirm that the students had grasped the meanings and uses of the new vocabulary terms.

Once the group discussion had finished, the students then had the opportunity to rewrite several emails for each scenario that I had selected from the ones they emailed me. While I let the students work in small groups to promote further discussion while rewriting, this activity could work just as well as an individual activity or a homework assignment. An example from Scenario 1 is listed below in Figure 5.

Following each small group's email rewriting activity, I asked a representative from each group to write their group's new email of a particular example on the board. This allowed for a visual comparison of each group's new emails, as well as a discussion of any differences in the language choices each group made.

Discussion Q: In small groups, look again at the 3 situations for the email exercise. What is the relationship between the participants? If we look again at the main elements of directives, how "strong" or "weak" should our directives be?

Pronouns?
 Modals and Semi-Modals?
 Imperatives?
 Hedges?
 Intensifiers?

Figure 4. Directions for small group discussion of scenarios

Until this point in the lecture, I had not presented any examples from the expert speakers' emails. However, now that they had practiced rewriting the emails themselves, presenting several examples of the expert speakers' emails allowed them to compare their newly written emails to the ones the expert speakers did. Using the labels I provided in Figures 1 and 2 above, I then presented typical examples from the original student emails in juxtaposition to the expert speaker ones. By placing all of the emails side-by-side, I was able to more easily show the differences between the choices each group made. In terms of directives, by presenting

Directions: Practice re-writing the following emails to make them more polite and acceptable in English

SITUATION 1

Dear. Dr. Emily

Hello, Emily. This is Joe Student.
 I want to ask you a question about the assignment.
 I think that there is a difference about date between the syllabus and what you said in class.
 Please tell me the correct date.
 Bye.
 Joe Student

Figure 5. Email re-writing activity

the data in this way, I was able to more clearly illustrate that even though the expert speakers used hedges like ‘please’ intermittently in their directives, the recurrent “polite” element in all of them wasn’t the modifier, but the use of an indirect request with a modal/semi-modal as the main element. This stands in stark contrast to the student emails, in which the students over-relied on hedges to mark politeness. When pared with an imperative (e.g. ‘Please tell me the correct date’), and given the social distance between the hypothetical student and professor in the scenario, the use of an imperative as a directive, even with the hedge, is inappropriate.

Presenting samples of the two groups’ emails also allowed me to highlight the two elements present in the expert speakers’ email that were not present in the students’ emails, namely (a) a reason for the request and (b) a thank you to the professor for considering the request, as well as the differences in greetings between the two groups. In terms of greetings, I presented all

<p>Expert Speaker:</p> <p>Hi Dr. Butler, Hi Professor Butler! Dear Dr. Butler, Good morning, Dr. Butler, Dear Dr. Butler, Dear Professor Butler,</p> <p>Japanese student:</p> <p>Hello Dr.Emily. Dear. Dr. Emily Hi, Emily, Dr. Emily Butler Dear, Dr.Emily Butler</p>

Figure 6. Expert speaker vs. student email greetings

of the greetings from the 21 student emails and the 6 expert speaker emails. A small sample is presented below in Figure 6.

The main difference between the two groups is that while the expert speakers used only the professor’s surname, the student group more often used the professor’s first name or used both names together. Again, while the students’ greetings are not ‘wrong’, the comparison with the expert speakers’ greeting highlights a more socio-pragmatically appropriate choice for this type of scenario.

In the last part of the lesson, I presented examples from several websites that give tips for email etiquette, highlighting several key points those authors bring up that mirror the points we discussed in class. These examples provide extra reinforcement of the concepts presented in class, as well as additional legitimacy to the concepts presented as well. A highlighted excerpt from a *US News and World Report* article on email etiquette for students is presented below in figure 7.

<p>6. Salutations matter. The safest way to start is with “Dear Professor So and So” (using their last name). That way you won’t be getting into the issue of whether the prof has a Ph.D. or not, and you won’t seem sexist when you address your female-professor as “Ms.” or, worse yet, “Mrs. This and That.”</p>

Figure 7. Salutations matter

Conclusions

Teachers often lament the inappropriateness of student emails, but lack the time, energy, and/or materials to do anything

about it. Research has shown that implicit modeling of pragmatically appropriate forms is not enough for students to completely acquire the necessary skills to participate in particular contexts; however, students do benefit from direct, explicit instruction of pragmatic forms and concepts (Bardovi-Harlig & Mahan-Taylor, 2003; Bouton, 1988; Kasper, 1995; Rose & Kasper, 2003). This article presents additional support that direct instruction in pragmatics is necessary in terms of doing email requests, given the major qualitative differences between the students' emails and the expert speakers'. The article also demonstrates one approach that teachers can use to raise students' pragmatics awareness using their own language in conjunction with information on speech acts.

Because this workshop was meant as an informal pedagogical intervention rather than as a formal study of the pre- and post-email language of students, I did not collect official samples of student emails following the workshop. However, in subsequent class-related emails from the students, I did notice improvements in their email writing, particularly in terms of 'greetings' and use of indirect requests. While this evidence is clearly anecdotal, the techniques and materials I used in the original lesson may hopefully provide some guidance to instructors wanting guidance in how to "do" raising pragmatic awareness but not sure how or where to begin.

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Facilitating Active Learning through Action Research

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One of the puzzles for American instructors teaching ESL to Japanese university students is the continual search for new ways to encourage “passive learners” to become “active learners” in the classroom. Students hesitate to ask questions or volunteer answers and may not participate actively in ways expected by the American university environment. To reach the goal of quickly engaging students in active learning, a project was designed to help students acquire language skills and confidence in an American academic environment as they created a program for community television. Principles of action research were used to evaluate and redesign the project, and to improve teaching.

Action Research

Action research in education is defined by Carl Glickman (1993), as a study conducted by colleagues to improve instruction. Action research starts with identifying a problem or dilemma in a classroom or with particular students. Once the problem is identified educators examine their teaching methods and materials for effectiveness in addressing the issue. For example, language teachers often observe that Japanese students are able to understand more English than they will orally produce. In the typical American university class, with the lecture-question format, many Japanese students will often remain respectfully silent. They may not volunteer answers or ask questions, and may pause for long periods before giving an answer when called upon. This silence is sometimes taken for lack of skill or confidence.

In this study, the teachers created a television performance project the previous year to facilitate language learning. At the end of the project, the teachers concluded that the project was successful for language learning and promoting active learning; however, they had not collected adequate data to evaluate this assumption. For this reason, a similar television performance project was conducted the following year. The goal of this project was to use principles of action research to encourage active learning, and to improve language skills and instruction techniques.

Action research problems can be divided into three parts (Rigsby, 2005): (a) the teacher’s first question or puzzle (TFQ); (b) the action research version of the question (ARV); (c) the hypothesis or strategy version of the question (H/SV). In this case:

1. The TFQ was, What are best practices for teaching passive learners?
2. The ARV asked, What can teachers do to make students become more engaged earlier in the semester and therefore more active learners?
3. Finally, the H/SV asked, What will students achieve if given the opportunity to create and perform a program on TV?

The research method of triangulation was used so that answers to the problem were considered from different perspectives using varied tools to gather data. With the hypothesis/strategy version of the question at the center of the triangle, data was cross-

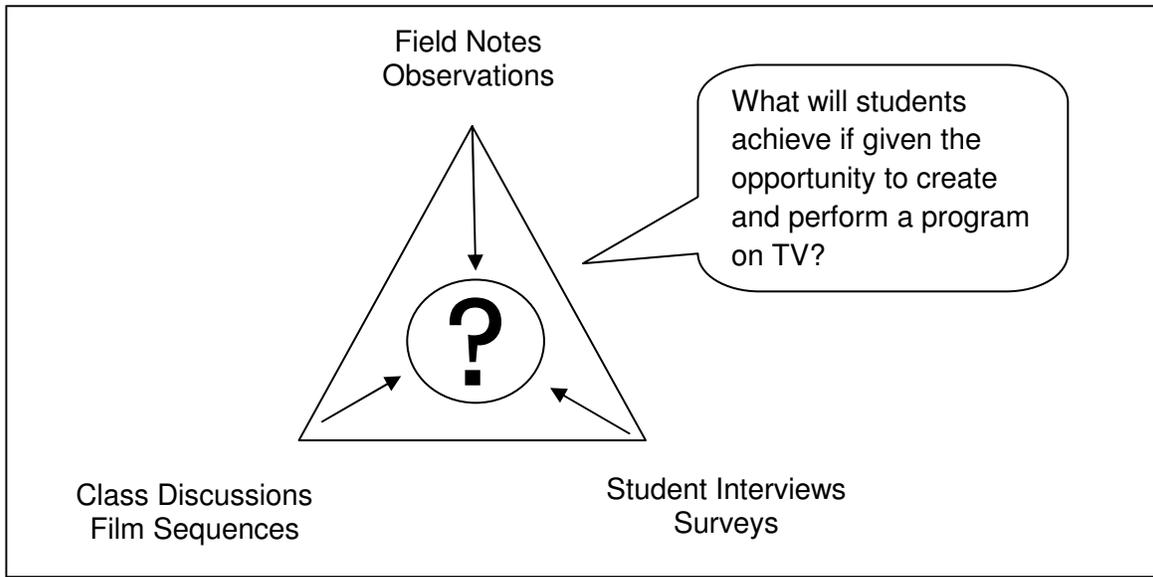


Figure 1. Triangulation Diagram

referenced by observing and writing field notes; by administering structured interviews and surveys to the students; by facilitating class discussions; and viewing filmed practice and discussion sequences.

Since action research is often qualitative and uses natural language rather than numbers, some data collected was anecdotal from teacher observation journals. In addition, communication is an important part of action research (Dick & Swepson, 1997); therefore, the teachers had ongoing discussions about student reflections and their own observations.

The Project

In this project, students created a presentation of a Japanese game or tradition to film for the local community television station. In preparation, a variety of assignments were developed to help students write the program content, practice for the performance and then reflect on their experiences. In order to facilitate student engagement a variety of experiences, including the

use of technology, were offered and utilized (Zorfass & Copel, 1995). The project was completed with two groups of 14 intermediate level students in Reading/Writing and Listening/Speaking classes who had come to the U.S. for a ten-month study abroad experience to study intensive English and sheltered content courses. The students had TOEFL scores ranging from 360 to 450. The majority of the students were Japanese, but there was also one Chinese and one Saudi Arabian student in the group. This project started the first week of class and teachers had only 3 weeks to get the students ready for television. Doing a project of this magnitude at the beginning of the program proves challenging, so principles of action research were implemented to help guide the teachers through the process and improve their teaching methods.

Figure 2 shows lists of assignments designed to prepare students for the television program and tools used to collect data and evaluate the project.

Reading/Writing Assignments

- Written reflection of television studio tour
- Photo storyboard of demonstration
- Written reflection of practice sessions
- Written reflection of filming practice
- Written reflection on elementary school performance
- Written reflection on television studio filming performance
- Microsoft Publisher Newsletter
- SurveyMonkey project evaluation survey

Listening/Speaking Assignments

- Opinion language lesson to discuss topic choices
- Speaking practice in groups
- Conversations and interviews with teacher and tutor
- Recording in Audacity for self-evaluation
- Dress rehearsal performance for elementary school
- Filmed group practices for peer review
- Discussions of reflections
- Photostory 3: Digital storytelling of project process

Tools and Data Collection

- Photo-journals with reflective writing
- Discussions of written reflections
- Recorded spoken reflections
- SurveyMonkey online survey of the project
- Small group discussions of survey results
- Filmed small-group discussions
- Large group discussion of survey results
- Filmed large-group discussions
- Written assessments of group discussion and individual discussion participation
- Filmed student-professor interviews
- Professor observation journals

Figure 2. Assignments and Data Collection Tools

Results

We now return to the research question, “What will students achieve if given the opportunity to create and perform a program on TV?”

Motivation

When educators equip students with the tools to become self-motivated, real engagement in learning takes place (Wasserstein, 1995). Students have the de-

sire to achieve personal goals and not merely attain an outside reward. This desire was clear as students became more involved in the project. Students’ written reflections discussed concerns about clear communication skills rather than a focus on grades. The student-stated goal was to create a product that they could be proud to share with the community. This product and performance focus promoted interest and in having a product focus their work connected to a meaningful end result (Zorfass & Copel, 1995).

Student commitment and engagement became quite evident on filming day. The night before filming at the television studio, the students received news of the earthquake and resulting tsunami in Sendai, Japan. That morning students were in tears and most had not slept. How could they be asked to celebrate family traditions on television when they had not heard word from home yet? Teachers were prepared to change plans and told the students it was their choice whether to film or not. The 28 students were given time to discuss it as a group and come to a decision without the teachers present. The students decided to complete the project as scheduled. They were able to temporarily set their worries aside and film the TV show. They showed perseverance and the ability to rise to the occasion in the face of adversity; characteristics typically valued by Japanese society.

The night before filming at the television studio, the students received news of the earthquake.

“On Friday, finally that important day was coming. Unfortunately, before that day, we heard shocking news, an accident happened in Japan. It was a big earthquake. However, we decided to record on the TV that day. All of us had strong hearts. Some girls wore beautiful yukatas. Of course, I also wore it by myself. I also helped wearing yukata for two of my classmates. I felt I was a kimono fitter. When we arrived at CCTV, I worked at part of having cue cards with my group mates. I really nervous because the work as very significant for the casts on TV. We felt that we would not be forgiven by classmates if we made a mistake such as dropping the cards on the floor. And more we were careful not to make a sound by sliding the papers. After that, our group’s turn came to film. At that time, I did not feel strain..... Our performance was better than the previous

ones.” (Keiko Koyama)

The ARCS model (Keller 2000), was also considered when analyzing how to engage students and instill confidence. The ARCS model requires four conditions be present for motivation to occur. Those conditions are: *attention, relevance, confidence and satisfaction*. When the project was introduced and students realized they would be making a television program, they became quite attentive. Creating a program about various aspects of Japanese culture was perceived as relevant because the class would be sharing their culture and knowledge with an American audience. A safe learning environment helped instill confidence in the students. Ample opportunities

to practice and receive constructive criticism and feedback were built into the project. The chance to perform several times was

provided before the actual filming for television. Practice sessions were videotaped in class and those films were reviewed for feedback by both the students and the teachers. In addition, students performed for peers and for elementary school students. The successive cycles of performance model of repeated practice and performance sessions allowed students to perfect their skills (Lynch & Maclean, 2001), and to gain confidence and be at ease when they made the recording in the television studio. The final condition of Keller’s model is satisfaction. Students gained satisfaction knowing they were sharing important aspects of Japanese culture with the community. They felt a sense of accomplishment when they saw the interest of the elementary school students and when they saw themselves on TV. Because the students took many photos of the experience, a photo bank was included

on the class websites and students were asked to include a photo with each written assignment. Additionally a series of photos was used for the digital storytelling assignment. Students were pleased to create homework assignments that revolved around their experiences and documented their personal memories. Student satisfaction was observed by teachers at the end of the project in evaluations. Comments from student interviews reflected achievement of the four conditions Keller believes are necessary for motivation.

“Yes, we could know our culture deeply and we speak English, so we get many skills in this project. I felt confident because we achieve our aim and carry out or task for some weeks.”

“It was very important for me to share my culture.”

“We practiced our filming many times. We can feel comfortable and confident and could grow up through this project.”

“It was a good experience for me.”

Small Group Discussion and Assessments

To collect feedback on the project and to practice listening and speaking skills during week 4, students were divided into small groups to discuss the project evaluation survey responses. After 20 minutes, the discussion was stopped and the students were given two assessments. One focused on the group and one focused on the individual. Each questionnaire had 5 questions with four response choices to determine if the students felt they had been active participants in the discussions. When responding to the questionnaire which focused on the group, the majority of the students re-

sponded that all group members were active participants in the discussion and the group encouraged everyone to participate. The group assessment started with the question, “How active was your group?” 27 out of 28 students answered that all group members participated equally. Question #2 asked, “Did your group encourage quiet, shy members to participate?” The majority of the students indicated that there were no quiet or shy members in the group. The next question asked, “How many ideas did your group discuss?” Over half the students answered “10-15”. Question #4 asked, “How many questions did your group ask each other?” and most students responded “between 5 and 10.” The final question on this assessment asked the students if the group was able to finish the discussion in the time limit. The majority said they had enough time, but 20% decided they needed more than 5 additional minutes to complete the discussion.

In addition to student evaluation of the group discussion, individual participation was also assessed. When asked to evaluate individual participation the majority answered that they had participated satisfactorily and had taken some notes during the discussion. The first question asked, “How active were you?” The overall majority, 17/27, answered they were satisfied with their participation. Question #2 asked, “Did you encourage quiet, shy members to participate?” All but 3 students responded there were no quiet, shy group members. The third question asked, “How many ideas did you suggest?” Most said they suggested “between three and five.” No one responded that they had not contributed any ideas. “How many questions did you ask?” was the fourth question. The majority had asked “between three and eight questions with only two students responding they had asked no questions at all. The last question

asked, “Did you take any notes during the discussion?” Responses to this question varied with over half the students responding that they had taken some notes.

The results of these questionnaires indicate that the students believed themselves to be active participants in the discussions. Their perception of the group dynamic matched their individual participation. During the discussion, teachers noted that most groups were extremely animated and were genuinely interested in the survey responses. Students discussed the responses and also added ideas that had not shown up on the surveys. This made it clear to teachers that the students were still engaged in thinking about the project. Students were still interested in adding ideas and perspectives.

The more reticent students did not hesitate to give ideas when the teacher called them by name.

Large Group Discussion

Student engagement was also demonstrated during the large-group video-taped discussion as students participated in asking questions and in giving comments on the project. It can be challenging to conduct a class discussion with Japanese students because they are unaccustomed to this academic format. However, during this large-group discussion, students shared more comments and opinions than they usually did on other topics. More students volunteered answers to the open questions. The more reticent students did not hesitate to give ideas when the teacher called them by name. There were no lengthy hesitant pauses before students gave answers and no students responded, “I don’t know,” to the questions. The students were willing to give their opinions and offer suggestions.

Oral Interviews

To evaluate the television project, teachers conducted one-on-one oral interviews with each student. Students took the interview questions home and wrote out their answers. This gave them the opportunity to think carefully about answers so they could give meaningful feedback. Students also practiced giving the answers to the tutors and spoke clearly and confidently while glancing at their notes during interviews with teachers. Each student came well-prepared to answer the interview questions and seemed unaffected by the small camera and tiny tripod on the table

filming their responses. This small assignment evolved into an unexpected opportunity for language practice and

confidence building as the students were eager to share their opinions in personal interactions.

As assignments were developed, student engagement was promoted through the use of technology that was new to students. One question in the oral interview discussed the technology used for the assignments. Students were able to choose more than one response to the interview question. Seventeen out of 28 students said technology made the project more interesting and 14 out of 28 said technology improved student preparation for the project. None of the students indicated that technology made the project more difficult or didn’t help in preparation.

Trial and Error

Action research alternates between action and critical reflection (Dick and Swepson 1997). The opportunity for criti-

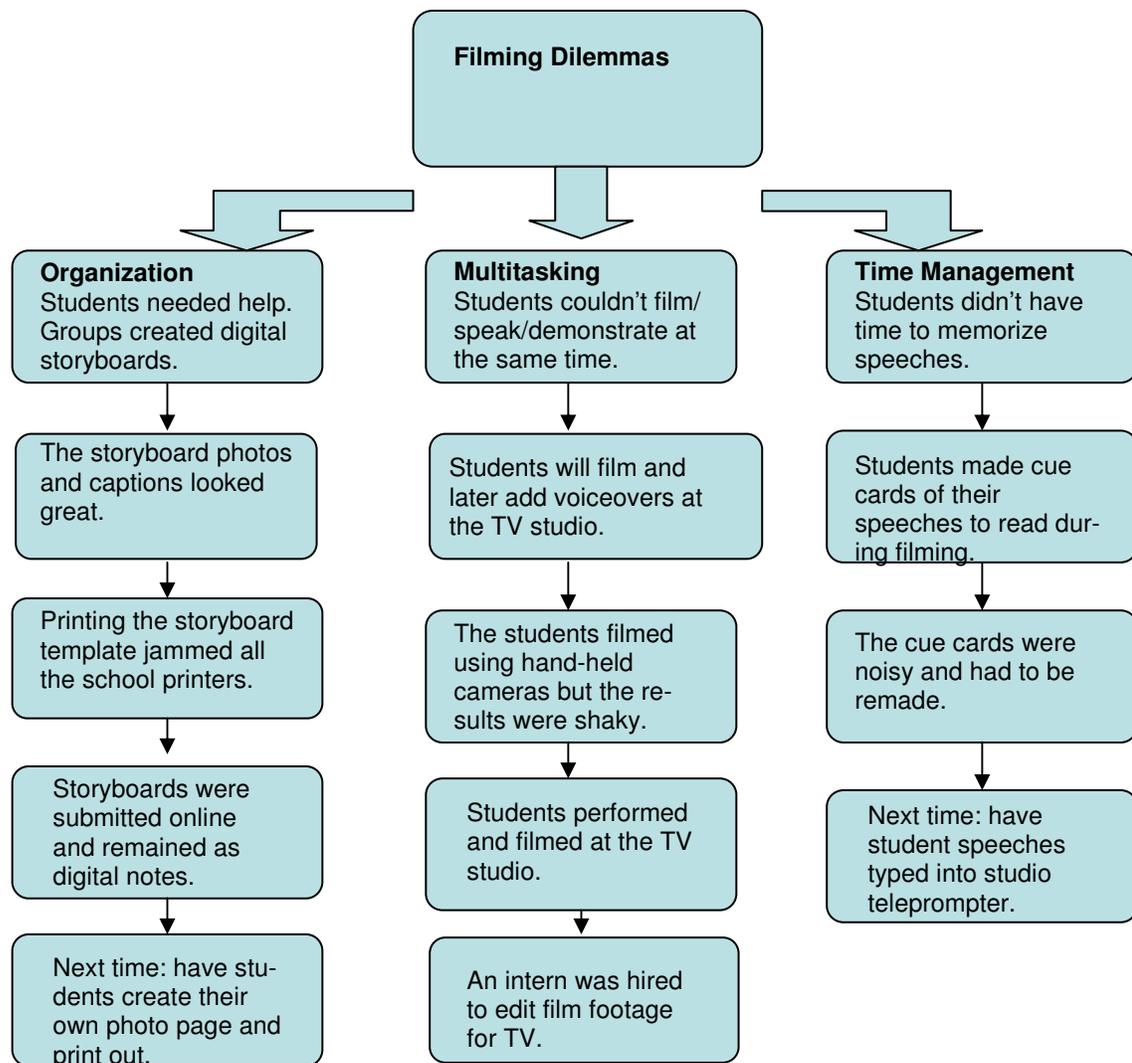


Figure 3: Filming Dilemmas Flowchart

cal reflection was built into assignments and students changed their behaviors and practiced more after viewing or listening to their own performances. As the project progressed, the teachers could also look back and reflect critically on the assignments and the activities used. Immediate changes were made when needed. For example, initially the television studio had planned on the students using the hand-held video cameras to film their own presentations. However, observation of the groups quickly made the

teachers realize that student filming could only be used for review and practice. In order to produce a high quality recording they would need to film in the TV studio with the larger cameras and skilled camera operators.

Following the tenets of action research, teachers made changes throughout the project after reviewing their notes, analyzing student feedback and discussing options. This flexibility continually refined the project and improved the quality of language

learning and the performances. Figure 3 shows some of the dilemmas, changes and counter-changes that were made.

Unexpected Authentic Language Use

Some additional factors that resulted in language practice in this project were unanticipated. When students became very involved in giving advice on what to do next year they would forget they were giving opinions, or using modals and persuasive vocabulary words to inform and serve as cultural guides to Japanese traditions. The project was designed with frequent evaluation tools in both oral and written form and the implementation contributed to building integrated language skills. Feedback and evaluation was readily given by students who also accepted filming during evaluations. The feedback process itself became an authentic communication experience. Teachers concluded the use of evaluation tools should be a practice for future projects to provide more authentic language opportunities.

“I think it was very good project because I could learn about importance of group work and know how to use some technologies. It was a very good experience for me because I could learn a lot of things and I have confidence about speaking in public” (Misaki Yamaguchi, Oral Interview).

“Next year they should make traditional Japanese food for a topic. Because I listened to American people and they want to know about Japanese food. So, I think to introduce Japanese food is a good idea” (Anonymous, Survey Comment).

Conclusion

As a result of action research findings, the following conclusions were noted in changing teacher expectations, creating a safe learning environment and improving teaching techniques to promote active learning in Japanese students.

The teachers in this study did not expect the Japanese students to immediately conform to western-style interactions in class. “As Howe (1993) says, whether students are “passive” or “active” in class depends more on their teachers’ expectations rather than on culturally based learning

Teachers expect students to express their individual ideas and engage in direct dialogue with the teacher.

styles. Many researchers have reported on the positive effects of teachers changing their beliefs and

expectations” (Tomlinson 2005). Teachers changed their expectations and allowed for more preparation and practice, expecting students would then be active learners. However, the television project still required high expectations of the students. Expectations of teachers did not change regarding *what* students could achieve, but rather on *how* students could achieve the expected outcomes. The teachers also did not believe performing on television was an impossible task for the students. It was conjectured the students would perform well given careful preparation time, a framework for the project and the project tools they needed to complete the work. It was also expected that students would be able to master the required language skills needed to perform cultural demonstrations on television and do so in a short amount of time. Students were expected to participate actively and the teachers concluded the students met these expectations.

Robert Norris (2004), who has taught in Japan for over 30 years, states that Americans who teach Japanese university students view behaviors that conflict with their own cultural expectations. In American classrooms, teachers expect students to express their individual ideas and engage in direct dialogue with the teacher; however, Japanese culture prepares students in a very different way. Group consensus and formalized speech-making are characteristics of the Japanese style of communication and it is these skills that Japanese ESL students bring to the classroom. By taking into account the cultural traits and creating assignments that draw on these traits, teachers can help the students succeed. The project design used small groups and these groups prepared formal presentations on traditional Japanese culture. This created an atmosphere from the start of the semester that allowed students to utilize their own cultural strengths while adapting to an American system of learning. Successive cycles of practice and performance were emphasized to match the Japanese cultural traits that focus on repetition in perfecting formal public performances. The teachers found their teaching improved when they focused on ways to incorporate these cultural assets.

Leveraging technology is another viable method for engaging students from the digital generation. Technology was used to quicken the production of final products and easily professionalize the appearance of student work in the project. In this case, teachers also utilized technology to add variety to the repetition of practice sessions and to slow down the process. Varying technology tools facilitated the separation of language learning exercises and project components into manageable parts and provided opportunities to recycle language. Using technology

to review performances allowed students critical reflection time to consider areas for improvement.

“At first, I thought our group was doing very well, but today we took a film, and we watched our film. I feel a little shocked. We thought we were good enough for a TV show, but the truth is we need more practice. We need to practice our pronunciation and our speed, and also we need to practice our demonstration. I think we should try to remember a little of our speech, so we can speak fluently when the next cue card is not ready. We need more practice. Practice makes perfect” (Lingjun Fang, Written Reflection).

A safe learning environment affects student engagement.

“My speech needs improvement. I have to speak more slowly, loudly and clearly. I think this is a chance to introduce Japanese tradition. So, I will try my best on this project” (Yoshie Kikuchi, Written Reflection).

A safe learning environment affects student engagement because the students feel free to take risks without fear of failure (Bowen, 2003). Because the assignments involved repeated practice sessions, the students felt better prepared for activities and this helped to build confidence in English skills. The repetition resulted in more active participation throughout the project.

Based on over twenty-five years of experience in teaching classes of Japanese students, the writers have found the following classroom management techniques work well to create a classroom environment to facilitate engagement and active participation in the classroom. Observation notes made dur-

ing this project supported this belief.

- Ask for volunteers to answer questions, read aloud, etc.
- If no volunteers, call on students by name to answer questions.
- Divide students into small groups and circulate around the room so they can ask questions in their small groups.
- Promote a comfortable atmosphere in the class where students are free to experiment with language and others don't laugh at their mistakes.
- Smile frequently.
- Conference with students individually to build rapport and create accountability.
- Show concern and respect for all students.
- Encourage with positive comments.
- Encourage classes to become a group and allow opportunities for each student to be appreciated by his/her classmates.
- Use humor to set everyone at ease and make learning enjoyable.
- Compliment questions when they are insightful or shared concerns.
- Compliment comments that show critical thinking skills.
- Share a little information about yourself to establish rapport and learn about your students.
- Be able to learn from your students.
- Consider and respect student opinions.

The problem with these techniques is that they can take a long time to develop in classes. For this project teachers wanted to accelerate the process of group cohesiveness, to lower that affective filter and create the environment that would promote active learning and do it all in the first few weeks

of class due to the early deadline of the television performance. According to the SurveyMonkey questionnaire (see Figure 2), 90% of the students said that the television project was useful for developing English skills and 90% also said the project should be completed again next year. The repetition, cultural values, technology and need for top quality in performance and English skills contributed to promote active learning.

Through student interactions, and patterns discovered in teaching observation journals, teachers noted several teaching techniques to continue implementing and developing in future class assignments and projects.

- Daily small group work (less lecture time)
- A product and performance focus
- A tight timeline for practice and language mastery
- Variety built into the practice
- The use of technology in practice
- Personalization of the experience with photos and film
- Specialized peer feedback
- Positive and constructive instructor feedback
- A familiar cultural topic
- Consideration of cultural values as strengths to incorporate into project

Action Research involves continual critical reflection and it can be very time-consuming. However, it is also a useful technique for focusing on the improvement of teaching. Active observation, careful consideration of notes, frequent communication and revisions were important components in this project. The most important part of this action research project was collaboration be-

cause the assignments crossed skill areas and the project was too large for one teacher to conduct alone. Critical reflection of both the teachers and students in a formalized way proved to be another factor in improving teaching and in promoting active language learning.

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Teaching Notes

Building a Bridge Between Instruction and Practice

Beth Sheppard, University of Oregon

Why do some students easily move through the lessons and tasks of a class, but finish with little change in their language skills? As teachers, what have we neglected in our instruction? In my high-intermediate intensive listening and speaking classes, I have often found that my students increased their comfort and range of self-expression, but not their accuracy, despite opportunities for task-based, communicative practice and formal instruction in pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar.

Both instruction about language form and content-focused communication practice are essential, but I have become convinced that it is also essential to build a bridge between the two, and that this third, linking element is often neglected.

In recent terms, my approach to building a bridge between instruction and practice has been to teach students to listen carefully to their own spoken production, to analyze and reflect on it, and to become more aware of how they speak. I do this by having them record each other in groups every week. The recordings are of monologues produced spontaneously in response to questions about topics we have been studying in class. Each student speaks for 1-2 minutes, and the recordings are made in small groups. Then the digital files are distributed to the speakers and each student transcribes his or her own speech, as well as completing various correction and reflection assignments throughout the process.

For example, after studying pronunciation rules related to sentence stress, students are asked to first correct any mistakes they see in their transcript and then circle the stressed syllables of content words. They read the script with attention to rhythm, lengthening the circled syllables and reducing others. After practicing, they record themselves reading their transcript with excellent sentence stress, and then they write a reflection on their corrections and their rerecording.

Some transcript assignments are more open-ended. For example, students might be asked to correct the grammar of their recorded speech, and then choose one grammatical correction that they would like to focus on for the next several weeks. Then, they are asked to listen for this grammar point in the language around them and in their own speech. They must also write down examples that they hear, mistakes that they notice, corrections they receive, and their own thoughts in a lengthy reflection.

This practice has a variety of advantages for students. When they choose their own mistakes to focus on, they are likely to choose relevant, salient, and learnable points for themselves. The instructor work involved is not very extensive with the balance of effort shifted to the students. And it gets results! A nine-week term is a very short time, but I have seen clear examples of increased awareness and self-monitoring leading to improvements in spoken accuracy.

Student self-correction and awareness building can't replace formal instruction about language elements, and neither can it replace more extended, purely meaning-based communicative practice. However, it builds an essential bridge between the two, and I would include such a strand in any intensive language class I teach in the future.

Additional Reading

These articles present a variety of related approaches to helping learners notice features of their own speech through recordings and transcription tasks.

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Helping Students Through Difficult Conversations

Maiko Hata, University of Oregon

Have you had students come to you crying, yelling, or completely depressed? As ESL teachers, we are often engaged in difficult conversations with our students. After making my transition from teacher to academic advisor, learning to navigate challenging conversations with international students has been demanding yet fascinating. Here are some techniques I have found helpful.

1. A smile and a friendly “How are you?” go a long way.

No matter what culture students might be from, this is always appreciated: After all, a smile is universal. I find this especially helpful when the student is being referred to us for “problematic” behaviors like excessive absences or cheating. The welcoming atmosphere usually diffuses such students’ “combat-ready” mentality: sometimes,

I can even see their bodies relax.

2. Listen carefully, because the issue is not often clearly expressed

Students come to us, demanding that we let them withdraw from the program or let them choose a level that they think is more appropriate. However, often it is not what they tell us initially that is really bothering them. When a crying student tells you she needs to drop out, what is really going on? Is she scared because she might not pass? Is her family going through financial difficulty? Did her boyfriend break up with her and she's feeling suicidal? Is the student who's rarely in class suffering from health issues? Could he be tired from observing Ramadan? Is Skyping late into night with his family back home keeping him awake till two every morning? After listening and asking appropriate questions, we can usually find more ways to help them. And of course, having someone who listens to them without judging helps them feel better.

3. Work on a realistic next step or goal.

When we know what is really going on, working on a next step or a goal helps students move on towards their futures, instead of looking at what went wrong. For the crying student mentioned above, our office probably would suggest that she discuss her progress and how to improve her skills with her teachers in a weekly conference. If the problem is more financial, we would direct her to information about on-campus jobs after checking her eligibility. Offering something, even when that is not what they originally asked for, is always appreciated.

4. Involve the students in the process.

Just like in the classroom, having students come up with their own plans helps them feel responsible. This seems to be especially important in discipline issues like ex-

cessive absences, cheating, or not submitting assignments on time. "What are your goals? Do you think this behavior is helping you achieve them? What would?" Simple questions like these can encourage them to look at their situations critically. I also try to make the goals S.M.A.R.T., as in Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, and Time-bound ("SMART criteria," 2011). It is a lot harder to stick to a goal if the goal is to "wake up early every day and never be late again." It is much easier with a S.M.A.R.T. goal in mind such as, "I'll finish Skyping with my family in China before 10:30 and go to bed by 11:30, so I can catch the 7:35 bus. I'll study for at least 1.5 hours every day at the library before going home to my chatty roommates. I'll also keep a schedule book and write down homework deadlines and test dates, so I can plan ahead to have at least a week for writing and editing drafts. This way, I'll be less tempted to cheat." And, remember to keep it realistic – some students get so excited about their plans that they tell us they will be going to bed at 9:30 and waking up at 5.

5. Know when and where to refer students.

It's always helpful to have an idea of useful resources for students. After all, we are not trained to deal with some of the issues that students have. As academic advisers, we often walk our students who sound depressed or suicidal over to our on-campus counseling center. On-campus legal services are very helpful too. For example, here at the University of Oregon, students can make an appointment with a lawyer for a free consultation about issues like tenant/landlord disputes. We also have a great office that works with students with disabilities. At all these places, we often stay with our students while they work on an intake questionnaire or while they talk with the counselor/lawyer. Many students seem to appreciate having a

familiar face, not to mention having someone who can work through complicated English jargon.

6. Last but not least, make sure they know you care.

Our students are in a foreign land with limited English, which can be very scary and humiliating. I still remember, vividly, how humiliating it was at times when I was an international student, and that was 15 years ago. Some students are amazed to learn that we do care. This also helps them open up to us, which in return makes helping them a lot easier. If you pay attention and give students the respect they deserve, they will feel a little, if not completely, better. Good luck!

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Posing Questions and Calling on Students *Laura Holland, University of Oregon*

Here is the situation: we are standing in front of the class. We are posing questions to our students about a reading, grammar point, listening selection or other language skill we are covering that day. We pose the question in what I term a “call and response fashion,” meaning that we put the question out to the group, not calling on any individual student. The students call out their responses and then we give general feedback and pose the next question. There are several advantages to this method of posing questions: it feels lively, it doesn’t take a lot of our precious time and can keep the pace of the class moving along quickly. Students who are more verbally adept can shine and feel more engaged than in writing. No one is put on the spot so it can be face-saving for

students who are shy about answering individually.

There is nothing wrong with this manner of questioning if it is one of many methods of posing and answering questions we use. The problem arises when we use it exclusively.

I have been spending a lot of time observing other teachers’ classes over the last few years and have noted that we all use this technique *a lot*. I was surprised to note that despite our knowledge of other alternatives, it seems to be the “go-to” approach for posing questions, my own classes included. Again, there is nothing wrong with it as one of the many techniques we employ. There

are, however, several disadvantages to relying solely on this type of question. For example, it is usually the same four or five students who are calling out their responses, thereby giving us the false impression that “everyone” is participating. These same four to five to six students are getting many more chances to participate, receiving feedback and taking the risks necessary for language learning.

Another disadvantage is that some students who have an answer ready, but for personal or cultural reasons, will never call out that answer. Such students do not get the opportunity to be held accountable like those who do participate and answer.

A third disadvantage is that in almost every class I have ever had, there are always at least one or two students who come to class wearing their “cloak of invisibility,” to borrow a term from J. K. Rowling and Harry Potter. They have learned over the years how to hide within the class and avoid getting called on. I have seen it in my own classes and in many others. The question then seems: when does “not putting students on the spot” cross over into denying them opportunities to step up and learn? What is my responsibility as the teacher to make opportunities for all my students to speak up and give it a try? How can I balance the need to draw them out with their need to feel safe enough? How can I involve the most students possible?

By simply adding a few more techniques to our repertoire, we can engage more of our students including those whose personal learning styles do not include the facility of calling out their answers publicly.

One of my favorite alternatives to the

call and response approach is really quite simple and effective. I am amazed--and a bit sheepish--that it took me so many years of teaching to stumble on this idea. Here is what I do: when I have a question to pose to the group I do so, but raise my hand in a “stop sign” and say, “Don’t answer yet. Turn to the person next to you and discuss the answer. See if you agree or disagree. If you disagree, convince each other. If you agree, say why. You have thirty seconds. Go!” I give them the thirty seconds then signal when the time is up. Next I call on pairs of students to answer. The amount of time I give them to discuss varies on the questions and problems posed.

It is such a simple change and yet its effect in my classes has been profound.

There is no doubt that this takes more time, so some teachers may see it as a definite disadvantage. But for me, it is an excellent investment of time. Everyone gets the

chance to discuss the questions *each time*. It imposes accountability on all the students, not just a few. No one sits back and relies on everyone else to engage and it is *much* harder to be invisible when your partner is staring you in the face expecting you to contribute. Those students who may feel intimidated about answering in front of the whole group can feel much more comfortable testing out their response with just one other student. They may be more likely to hazard a guess, educated or otherwise, if they are speaking up to only one other classmate and not focusing on any potential humiliation in front of the entire class. Those quieter students who always have the answer but will never volunteer unless called on now have the chance to speak up and articulate what they know, which to me, is a valuable piece of the learning process. When presenting to the whole group the partners are acting as a pair and can use the best answer they came

up with and not necessarily the one that initially came out of their mouth. Perhaps best of all, communication is a key ingredient in this model.

Some students need more time to process a question and formulate an answer. We all know this and it is well documented. Using this technique can certainly slow things down, but in a positive way, so that those students needing more time actually get it and so that I, as teacher, wait more than the requisite one-second before I start expecting an answer to my question. It is such a simple change and yet its effect in my classes has been profound. I have used this in both ESL and teacher training classes and I encourage all the teachers I observe and work with to give it a try. Nearly all report a decidedly positive effect on class participation and I am happy with the rigor it helps me impose in my classes. Each question posed becomes an opportunity for everyone to discuss and learn. More bang for my buck.

Many teachers both here and abroad call directly on students. In my observations I see this done often and it is another excellent way to engage students. Calling on them randomly is a great way to keep students on their toes and makes for a useful tool to add to our teaching toolbox. But one problem is that, as humans, we have a natural gravitation toward certain individuals, for whatever reason, and some students simply get called on more often than others unless the teacher is taking great care to be sure everyone gets their turn. Some teachers go around the room, following the seating chart to address this, but a possible disadvantage is that many students will not actually pay attention to all the other answers

and will instead prepare their own answer ahead of time, which defeats the purpose. How then, can we call on students randomly and make sure we are getting to everyone and not allowing anyone's eagerness, charisma or cloak of invisibility to get in the way?

I draw here on something I used in my K-12 days, which is a funny and inexpensive tool readily found in craft stores and supermarkets: popsicle sticks. Each term I have one stick for each student and write her/his name on it. These I keep rubber-banded in my backpack throughout the term and use when needed. I find it helpful in making sure I am calling on everyone

Nearly all report a decidedly positive effect on class participation.

evenly and not accidentally giving certain students more turns than others. I ask a question then pull a stick with someone's name from the pile, laying it on the

desk when finished. I ask another question and reach back into the pile again, knowing that I will not unintentionally gravitate to the most willing students or the ones I am most drawn to. When my mind is freed from this classroom management task I can focus less attention on the asking and more on their answers and my feedback.

The sticks have also proven excellent tools when it comes time for students to give presentations. Usually there are several students who volunteer to go first but towards the middle of the group the volunteers sometimes dry up. Valuable class time is wasted in waiting for more people to volunteer and if I pick randomly at that point, some students may wonder "why me?" So I let the popsicle sticks do the choosing and the dynamic is changed completely. I reach into the bunch wagging my eyebrows, draw one out and voilà, the next presenter is chosen.

The students always laugh at this, no one feels picked on, it takes only seconds, and the entire process becomes one of our many class jokes, solving the problem and strengthening our classroom community all at once. Small index cards or notes with their names written on them can be used as well, but I like my popsicle sticks for the element of humor they seem to add. Some terms I have the students write their own names and personalize them on the first day and pass them back with short personalized messages as souvenirs of the class at the end of the term.

Just as I look for ways to hold my students more responsible for their own learning, this is something I can do to hold myself more accountable in making sure they all receive meaningful opportunities to learn.

As I search for more ways to actively involve my students in class, one other technique I use is to allow my students to call on each other. A “Koosh” or other soft round ball is good for this. I pose my question then toss the ball to someone to answer. When I pose the next question, I tell the first student to “call” on someone by tossing her/him the ball. The students take over the “calling on” piece of the class. I remind them to give everyone a chance and not call solely on their friends. Depending on the activity I may ask them to step in and pose the questions as well. It’s very hard to fall asleep in class when a Koosh ball may be headed your way at any moment. It is

unexpected and lively. I did not think up this technique but I have used it with great success for decades as one of many ways to keep students actively engaged in their own learning process and to find ways to energize and liven up my classes.

The above practices will seem alien and strange to many of our students at first. But by the end of the first week they are engaged and participating at a level we are all comfortable with. Plus, the feedback I get from them is almost always positive. I urge all the teachers I work with to have a look at our practices and note how often we rely on one approach or another. Chances are we can balance our routines further in order to reach even more students. They do not require a complete retooling of our practices; rather, they are a simple tweaking of what we already do and if you try it, I think you will find that these small changes can lead to a dynamic effect in your classes.

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