

## Positive Anchoring for Reflective Development

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This is an article about a technique that can be used in teacher training/development and in the language classroom. It is based on the principle of recalling past successful learning experiences as a means of anchoring new experiences in the present. It is simple and effective, and I'd like to share it with you.

This summer I ran a four-hour drama workshop for about forty Junior High and High School teachers of English at the Foreign Language Centre at my university. This was part of a busy one-week in-service training and development course. As I planned the workshop, I asked myself how I could create some personal space and time for quiet reflection during the session.

I recalled some similar reflective pauses from my own experience. First, I remembered how a former colleague, Martin Doolan, had often asked teachers on training seminars in Yugoslavia in the 1980's to think back to their most successful learning experiences as a way of encouraging them to re-examine their own teaching and learning priorities. Secondly, I remembered reading a few years before about the neuro-linguistic planning technique of anchoring particular behavioural responses in order to assist the adoption of new patterns of behaviour [1]. Thirdly, I was pointed in the direction of using reflection to good effect by a colleague of mine at Tsukuba University, Bill Plain, who has written elsewhere [2] on the need for people to be able to understand in a personal way new knowledge before this new knowledge or experience can be successfully integrated into their own lives.

From these quiet reflections, I decided to devote more time and space at the beginning of the workshop (about 25 minutes) for recall of past experiences, silent reflection, relaxation and visualization. Then, after the initial 25-minute section of the workshop, the participants were asked four more times during the next three hours to stop, step back, reflect and make notes about what they noticed as they engaged in the drama tasks. These cycles of reflection then provided the base for discussion, analysis and evaluation in the final 30 minutes of the workshop. So, this initial planning approach helped me assign a third of the time available towards reflection, something that I had never 'dared' envisage before in previous in-service training work.

Briefly, the time allotted for reflection was managed in the following way. After 5 minutes of group-mixing and ice-breaking exercises, the teachers were asked to sit down with their actor/speaker partner, and were given a sheet of paper each. They folded it into eight squares. As they did this, I explained that I'd be later asking them to make some quick notes about different experiences in the squares. We relaxed, and the teachers were asked to recall silently any successful moments where they as learners or teachers of English had acted, enjoyed the experience of acting and felt satisfied with what had happened in the classroom (with strong emphasis on the three leitmotifs of success, satisfaction and enjoyment). They were asked to focus on one or two moments in particular.

After some minutes of silent reflection, the teachers were asked to label the top four squares on their sheet of paper, like this:

SELF	OTHERS
ACTIVITIES	ENGLISH

They were then instructed to write down in each square a few key words that described and summarized the positive experiences that they had recalled. After some further minutes of reflection and making notes, the teachers then explained and discussed their notes in pairs, thus finding both shared and different positive ways of looking at, and experiencing, English through Drama.

At this point, I explained to the whole group that I had asked them to do this so that they could make deeper, more meaningful connections between what they had experienced as individuals in the past and what they were going to do in the workshop that day.

I then led the group through a longer relaxation and visualization exercise which moved us towards the other workshop goal of creating, in pairs, a five-minute four-scene play about a homestay packing and saying goodbye in a foreign country; arriving at the airport in Japan; travelling home with their Japanese host; and then being shown round the Japanese home. During this process - after the first two scenes, again after the third, and after each pair performing their play to another pair - the participants were asked to make some notes in the other four squares about:

- (i) how they felt;
- (ii) what they noticed about the others in the workshop;
- (iii) what they noticed about the activities;
- (iv) what they noticed about the English of the 5-10 minute plays that they had created in pairs and performed to another pair.

The four bottom squares of the present thus mirrored the top four squares of the past. As they made the notes, I again put the stress on the positive.

Finally, in the last thirty minutes of the workshop, the teachers rotated partners beyond the groups of four mentioned above, and used the notes in their bottom four squares to discuss these two points:

- \* possible concerns about using English through drama in my teaching situation
- \* possible adaptations of English through drama for the learners in my classes,

as well as spend ten minutes writing an evaluation of the whole workshop.

The two discussion points aimed to help the participants identify their own future ways of using English through drama, if they so wanted to, and to consider adjustments that they would find important for their own particular classes, all the while respecting each individual's integrity as a teacher in their own right. They also attempted to let the teachers identify and then deal with potential 'problems' on the basis of previous positive thinking and reflection.

While not wanting to suggest that there is anything magical about the above procedures, there is something quite satisfying in their flow and in the deep chords that they may touch. The notes that different teachers made seem to bear witness to this, one example of which follows:

*My key words (past)*

- \* junior high school
- \* sing a song
- \* T-T

*The others (past)*

- \* cheerful
- \* interested  
in English
- \* try to learn other  
language

*The activities (past)*

- \* loud
- \* fun
- \* humor

*The language (past)*

- \* rhythmic

*How do you feel?  
(present)*

- \* fun
- \* excited
- \* real

*What I notice about  
the others (present)*

- \* they make a lot  
of situations
- \* they try to play  
very hard
- \* they are interested in  
this
- \* creative
- \* smiling

*Three good points about  
activities (present)*

- \* imagine (expand)
- \* notice difference  
between Japan and US
- \* loud

*What I notice about the  
English in other pair's play (present)*

- \* creative
- \* smooth
- \* natural

On the other hand, some of the evaluative comments included:

- \* *I can enjoy today's drama with pleasure. I want to teach my students joy of playing drama.*
- \* *Most of the participants are doing enjoyably like small children. That's magic of drama. By taking this way, we can easily and happily use English, real lively English.*
- \* *When I called back my memory of doing drama I could find many things that I already forgot ...That feeling came back to me again after 15 years and I got very excited again ! Although, it's kind of difficult to let our students do as it is. So I hope I take some of your idea and make my own way teacher's.*
- \* *I can apply today's practice ...and I can also do something about short drama in my class. Thank you for giving me a chance to develop my English class. At first I'm very ashamed, but at last I feel my pleasure to express myself.*

To my mind, there is a reflective depth in these comments and a positive sense of 'empowerment / expansion' / 'sense of self and potential self' . Part of this may come from English through Drama itself, but my intuition is that the greater part springs from the cycles of reflection and positive anchoring of the new with the old - or, in other words, the sometimes forgotten or barely conscious knowledge and positive experiences that we all carry with us, and can recall and build on if we have a chance to make some inner journeys of our own.

### Notes

1. See Frogs into Princes (1979) by Bandler and Grinder (Moab Utah: Real People Press), for example.
2. Plain, W. (1990) 'A Glimpse inside the Teacher Development Classroom', *Niigata University Liberal Arts Lower Division Research Papers*, Volume 21: 61 - 84.

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