

AN INTERVIEW with YOSHIHIRO NAKAMURA

Dr. Nakamura has his M.A. and a Ph. D. in Curriculum Instruction from the University of Kansas. After two years of teaching Japanese language and culture at the National University of Singapore, he taught at the International Christian University for four years, teaching English and Teaching Methodologies. For the past five years he has been a professor at Chikushi Jogakuen University, teaching Applied Linguistics, Contrastive Linguistics as well as teacher training courses. He is also a part-time instructor of Japanese to foreign students. Our conversation took place in Professor Nakamura's university office on September 27, 1994.

McClain: First, Yoshihiro, could you tell me how you became an SIT supervisor?

Nakamura: SIT started the Japan program about two years ago, I think, and they were looking for supervisors. A friend of mine at Temple recommended me, and SIT thought I was qualified to do the job. But I'm not a full-time faculty member for SIT.

McClain: Who do you supervise?

Nakamura: I have two supervisees. They are both Americans who teach in Japan. One is teaching at a private high school and the other is teaching at a public junior high school.

McClain: Would you describe the mechanics of supervising?

Nakamura: OK. It depends on the supervisor, but what every supervisee has to do is, over a period of one and a half years, they have to write six papers on various aspects of teaching such as, let's say, error correction, teaching culture...whatever topics they are interested in. Supervisors don't give topics. We don't say "This is what you have to write about." It's a discovery learning process. So almost everything comes from the supervisee.

The other major thing is that...we visit them three times, two days each time, during the course. We observe their teaching, and we discuss the teaching after the observation. I require my supervisees to keep journals, and they choose three or four classes and write about those classes. I require them to send their journals to me once every two weeks, and I make comments as I see fit. If they have any questions, they usually call me or I call them. So, we talk quite a lot by telephone. I visit them only three times, so the journals and the telephone conversations are major components of the communication between the supervisee and the supervisor.

McClain: Do you use a particular style or way of giving feedback?

Nakamura: Well, what I try to do is to force them to think about their teaching, to provide...an opportunity for them to reflect on their own teaching. What I'm trying to do is to give clues, but not to impose my own opinions on them, which is very difficult to do, because it's very easy to tell your students what to do, what to write about or how to think, but that's the thing I try to avoid. I try to ask questions instead of giving my own opinions. I keep asking "Why?" questions, like, "Why did you choose one technique over another?" I'm interested in *their* decisions and the reasons for their choices.

McClain: Do you use any specific observation tools while you are observing?

Nakamura: No, not really. They have to write lesson plans, and I read them, and we go over them, and I ask questions if anything is not clear. So, as they teach, I have a copy of the lesson plan, and I observe and make notes.

Mainly, I focus on what they say they will be teaching, because in their lesson plan, they have to specifically state the goals of the lesson--the goals for the students, what the students are supposed to be doing or supposed to be achieving by the end of the class--and the teacher's objectives, goals--whatever his or her, as a teacher, goals are in this one particular lesson. We then go over and discuss whether the objectives for both student's and teacher's were achieved. If not, what's wrong with them?

We don't focus on negative points, either. If something went really well, was effectively taught, then we try to analyze why that was the case. So, that will be the major portion of our discussion.

McClain: In general, what are the things that the supervisees need to learn or to develop in their teaching?

Nakamura: I think the first thing is the willingness to reflect. It's very painful, you know, to reflect about your own teaching. It's like looking through your exam scores. If you perform poorly, say, out of a 100, you get less than 30 points in a Math test or an English test, it's very difficult to go over it and say, "What's wrong with my performance?" That's what I'm trying to encourage them to do. Once they start doing that, their observation skills become more effective, and they can focus on their teaching, and they can start self-analyzing what is good about their teaching or what could be improved for the next lesson.

McClain: Are there any comments or recommendations you would like to make to other supervisors, teacher trainers, trainees, or student teachers?

Nakamura: For supervisors, this job with SIT is very good for me, because it gives me an opportunity to reflect about my own teaching and compare it with the supervisee's teaching. It's a kind of professional development. I've learned that it's very difficult to do, but I think I'm beginning to learn how not to tell supervisees what to do. It's very easy to say, "No, this is how you should be teaching," but we cannot say that, because their students are not my students and every class is different.

I find it difficult to talk about my own teaching with my colleagues. There are various reasons for it, including that we just don't have time to get together and talk about it. Plus, no one likes to be criticized, if you can call it that. But it is necessary to observe your own teaching rather objectively. I think that the SIT supervisor/ supervisee system is very effective. It provides an opportunity to reflect. The supervisees are teachers, they have full time jobs, but as I said, they don't have a chance to talk with their own colleagues. Sometimes, for many supervisees we are the only ones who will ask them the questions and force them to think about their own teaching. That applies to me as a supervisor as well, because I have to think about my own teaching by observing their teaching and comparing their teaching with mine. I learn a lot from them, too. Certain techniques or teaching skills that I never thought of, even the use of little games that I never thought of. If they are effectively done, then I can use the same technique in my own classes. So I really enjoy this work.

Supervisees need to learn what they need to do in their own classes. That means they have to learn basic techniques, but they can't use them without changing or adapting them. They need to develop their own teaching style.