

Maslow's lower order needs of paying for food and housing and earning a decent salary. How do we truly expect teachers to develop and think seriously about their teaching when they are only kept around for short periods of time? It's like the people in Japan who think that they can catch up on their sleep while commuting on the train. Just when they start to nod off, the train arrives at the station, and they have to get off.

So, in response to my concerned former colleague, yes, I am doing the hokey-pokey. But, I'd posit that many others out there are as well. Until teachers are accorded more respect by their administrations/employers and their contributions are validated by the researchers in the field, most people are probably going to be doing the hokey-pokey at some point in time or another. For me personally, I'm not necessarily doing this "dance" everyday, nor have I reached the point where I'm putting my "whole self" in and out. But rather, I'm aware of the fact that I'm engaged in this "dance" at some points in my semester and cope with it while I'm still only using my "right foot", which is better than finding out too late that I've been doing this dance everyday and discover that my "whole self" is out and the dance is over.

CLASSROOM AMBIANCE TO FACILITATE FOREIGN LANGUAGE ACQUISITION

Leon Piasetski

"When you entertain evil thoughts like hostility and hatred, there is no joy in your heart and you are a nuisance to others.

On the other hand, if you develop kindness, patience and understanding, then the whole atmosphere changes"

(The Dalai Lama, 1995).

This article will focus on the issue of improving classroom ambiance to enhance learning. Various factors that frustrate communication will be considered, such as large classes, lack of student motivation, and differences in cultural expectations. Then, several recommendations will be offered on how to engage student interest, reduce tension, and develop a closer relationship between teacher and students. In particular, readers will be introduced to meditation techniques and their potential benefits in the classroom.

University language teachers in Japan often complain about classroom inertia. Teachers may entertain, challenge, cajole, or berate their students but still encounter a wall of silence. Since traditional

methods, such as Communicative Language Teaching, seem ineffective, some educators turn to more creative alternatives, such as The Silent Way and Suggestopedia - interested readers may refer to Richards and Rodgers (1986). However, results using these methods have not been conclusive (Crookes and Chaudron, 1991).

The crux of the problem of silence in the classroom remains how to bridge the socio-cultural gap between teacher and students. Improving communication obviously requires effort on the part of all participants. However, to achieve this improvement, teachers need to take the first step by being sympathetic, encouraging, and, most importantly, relaxed. If students recognize that the teacher is interested in developing a closer relationship with the class and appreciate the effort, it will create a more comfortable classroom atmosphere, and thus support students' foreign language acquisition.

On the other hand, due to culturally based expectations of formality for teacher/student roles, some students may at first be surprised and disconcerted by the teacher's sympathetic but unconventional behaviour. Nevertheless,

it is a risk worth taking. In high school, students who devote much time and effort to pass the arduous university entrance examinations, may also lack the opportunity to develop their social skills (Kelly, 1993). In university, most students slowly mature as they explore wider interests and the attitudes of a teacher could have a profound influence on their development.

Problems in the university language classroom

It may seem obvious for educators to familiarize themselves with student backgrounds, motivations, and abilities in order to assess their language level and set realistic goals for them. However, university language teachers often have many large classes and can count themselves lucky if they know the names of most of their students, even by the end of term.

In addition, as Nozaki (1993) explains, Japanese university students often lack motivation. One reason is that they know, even with minimal effort, they will most likely graduate due to the "escalator system." Since "passing courses is mostly a formality," Nozaki notes that students often choose to socialize and

focus their attention on non-academic pursuits, such as part-time jobs, extra-curricular activities, or personal interests rather than study.

University teachers in Japan are accorded respect and status by society at large. Although, theoretically, democratic philosophy has permeated and altered Japanese social structures including the educational system, in the classroom, teachers are in control – they talk and students listen. This may not be the case in every classroom but it is the model for most. Many Japanese students have been taught to respect authority from a young age, to observe the teacher quietly and follow instructions. They have little experience in asserting themselves verbally and are reluctant to raise questions or even answer them unless provided with a well-established routine for such behaviour (Anderson, 1993).

Bailey (1990) discusses the inculcation of values, such as neatness and uniformity, in primary school and points out that "routines, once established, are maintained not by the teacher but by the children." Furthermore, Bailey explains that, "students police each other, and so they become extremely self-conscious." If they do not conform, "they risk becoming

ostracized or worse, victims of *ijime*, a brutal form of persecution by peers." It is no wonder that many students remain inhibited throughout their school life.

Traditionally, Japanese culture has focused on perfection in every detail. As a consequence, students may feel intimidated because they lack confidence in their language ability. Moreover, six years of studying English may actually have undermined their ability because the focus on grammar translation does not prepare students to speak (Bailey, 1990). Yet making and correcting mistakes is an inherent aspect of language learning.

Stereotyping is a common source of cultural misunderstanding and may also contribute to students' silence by increasing their confusion. For example, students, who know the clichés about Japanese behaviour, may be reluctant to give their opinions to a foreign teacher to avoid being labeled. Furthermore, the same students who are hesitant to speak in class are often quite talkative among friends and even enthusiastic when singing karaoke, dispelling the notion that 'Japanese are shy' by nature.

Classroom management is usually not a major problem at university. A teacher

enters a classroom with a curriculum to follow and expects students to participate. However, if students remain silent, the teacher may misinterpret their behaviour as defiance, become upset, and use forceful methods to get cooperation, thereby alienating students. On the other hand, some teachers frequently use aggressive tactics in dealing with minor infractions, such as students arriving late or talking quietly during class. Embarrassing a student in front of the class may set an example but it will also diminish student trust in the teacher's good will.

Some students may already subconsciously regard the teacher as a language opponent, someone to avoid or ignore, and, in the worst case scenario, a foreign teacher might actually become an adversary, trying to impose a difficult language on reluctant pupils and failing those that give up. To prevent this from happening, foreign teachers should reconsider their pedagogical expectations, especially in view of the academic realities of most Japanese universities (Kelly, 1993). If teachers can recognize and reduce their cross-cultural anxiety and maintain a relaxed attitude, minor disturbances can be dealt with efficiently and without repercussions.

Advocating Participation - creating a positive classroom ambience

There are various ways to encourage participation and develop a friendlier relationship with students. One simple method is to occasionally use a Japanese word or phrase, in context, as an explanation. This cross-cultural, sympathetic act engages their attention and interest. Although the debate on the appropriateness of L1 in the classroom remains unresolved (Ellis, 1994), the purpose here is not the use of L1 as a pedagogical tool, but to improve classroom ambience.

The teacher can also occasionally ask a student to translate an English term into Japanese. This expresses interest in the student's culture and models language learning. Also, it may help students realize that language learning is an ongoing effort on the part of every learner, since the teacher is still interested in learning.

Talking with students on a familiar level, especially about the teacher's homeland or personal viewpoints, is another method to establish closer ties. Essentially, foreign teachers are diplomatic representatives of their country's culture

and powerfully shape the impressions of students whose only previous exposure to foreign cultures probably came via the influence of media.

Teachers do not need to probe personal issues but by stating their viewpoints about their own society and its values, and referencing their own experiences, they can personalize general topics and communicate their concerns. Despite the lack of language skills, many Japanese students can intuitively understand that the teacher is trying to empathize and establish a personal connection with them. This may be, in part, due to their high context culture (Hall, 1990) which places greater emphasis on deducing intentions than direct expression. Thus, students can grasp the teacher's deeper message from the emotional content.

Classroom ambiance can also benefit from a variety of stress-reducing approaches. 'A busy mind is a distracted mind' - this phrase exemplifies Krashen's affective filter hypothesis (1982), which suggests that the mind can absorb and retain information more efficiently in a relaxed state. For example, teachers may feel pressure to cover the required contents of the syllabus. Yet, it is important to realize that there is nothing

wrong with review. Teachers may assume that students know material taught earlier in the course only to discover the opposite is true. Allowing more time for review and reinforcing concepts will decrease the anxiety level in class and provide teachers with a gauge to assess student progress.

Meditation in the language classroom

Teachers may wish to explore meditation as a relaxation method in class. There are several reasons for choosing this technique. To begin with, practising meditation may help students feel more comfortable in class. Also, students will probably appreciate a mental break in their study routine, and it shows the teacher is interested in their welfare. As an added bonus, students may discover that meditation is useful in their daily life because it helps reduce tension and reenergizes the mind and body.

However, before exploring the uses of meditation in the classroom, there are several caveats to consider. First, many Japanese students have tried zen meditation during high school and rejected the practise because of its rigour. Second, students are often tired and may lapse into sleep at the earliest opportunity

- this danger increases during meditation since many meditative techniques are performed with closed eyes. Finally, meditation is a solitary experience and it may be difficult to check if students are practising it correctly.

I have been interested in meditation for over twenty years but have been reluctant to teach it to students because of these objections. However, I have given students a handout on 'relaxation' techniques (See Appendix 1) and, after a brief explanation and training session in class, suggested they continue to practise on their own. Further questions that remain to be explored are whether students' attitudes towards meditation have been biased by previous experience or by the media censure of cults, and whether students derive observable benefits right from the start of practising meditation.

Meditation techniques

Although teachers may not wish to teach meditation to students, they can still gain from practising it themselves. Teachers are invited to try the following three techniques to evaluate their potential advantages.

(1) A simple meditation procedure is focusing on the breath to calm emotions and reestablish mental clarity. While breathing, the mind concentrates on a specific point, such as the tip of the nose, and observes the breath as it passes through the nasal cavity, with no attempt made to control it.

(2) Another procedure is to pay attention to the forehead while imagining an idyllic scene in nature, such as a quiet tropical beach. This helps relax the body because of the tranquil imaginary setting while using visualization to achieve mental concentration.

(3) Finally, sound can also be employed as a focusing tool, using a mantra to concentrate attention. Surprisingly, mentally repeating a word, such as relax, can often produce a swift calming effect.

After sufficient practise, these techniques can be used in daily life situations, such as waiting in lines, and can provide immediate benefits by inducing a peaceful state of consciousness.

Meditation is also useful as a psychological tool to probe the way the mind functions and arrive at a deeper understanding of one's motivations. By

focusing attention on body sensations meditators learn to recognize emotional reactions and how they trigger inappropriate behaviour. In her insightful master's thesis, "Awareness: A powerful tool to improve classroom management and influence student attitudes," Barque (1990) describes introspective meditative techniques that helped her clarify classroom management issues and achieve perspective. At first, she explains the technique used to observe the connection between body sensations and emotions.

"I learned to scan my body in just a few seconds - I usually found some part which was tense - I was contracted, which indicated resistance - I recalled the events of the class - to detect which events had provoked a negative reaction in me. I began to detect a correlation between the degree of expansion and contraction of my body and my emotional state." (pp. 7-9)

Initially, Barque assumes that students provoke her emotional reactions by misbehaving. Eventually, she begins to take responsibility for her feelings and adopts a more positive attitude towards her students. She recognizes that "presence in the moment is a vital factor

in teaching", and that she gets distracted from this state of consciousness by her reactions. She goes on to describe these emotional triggers and their negative effect on her ability to remain focused in the classroom.

"I saw that fear, which I often felt because of insecurity, put me into the future. In class, when I was trapped in the insecurity mode, my attention was partially focused on what was going on and partially on the next activity ... Feeling anger meant wanting things to be different from the way they were. It was another way of not being in the present."

(p. 14)

There are alternative relaxation methods that teachers may prefer, such as biofeedback, tai-chi, and yoga. The main idea is that teachers often have a large influence on students and, by being relaxed, they help improve the classroom atmosphere.

Reasons for pair and group work

However, even if teachers follow these suggestions, they may still find that some students are reluctant to answer questions. These students may hesitate to offer an individual opinion or venture a

response because they wish to avoid embarrassment in front of their peer group (Anderson, 1993). Anderson suggests that students need to feel safe before they will respond and goes on to describe characteristics of the Japanese communicative style that exemplify this behaviour in class, including group-mindedness and consensual decision-making. Anderson concludes that the best way to encourage student talk is through pair work and group work with tightly controlled tasks because this will minimize individual risk.

Student educational experience in Japanese high schools is varied but not necessarily stressful in all cases (Rohlen, 1983). However, many students do suffer great hardships in the effort to pass university entrance examinations. The successful students, who enter university, have probably been subject to strict control and regimentation throughout their high school education. Having them work in small groups occasionally will help develop their self-reliance while they explore a topic. This will also enliven the class atmosphere because students are more willing to express themselves in front of a small group of peers.

Even though there is a legitimate concern

that students may not always stay on task during group work, it does give the teacher an opportunity to circulate between groups, answer questions, or initiate discussions on a one to one basis. Most importantly, the focus shifts from the teacher to the group. As a result, groupwork often reduces class tension because most students feel more comfortable talking in a small group among their peers than answering the teacher's questions in front of the whole class. Students learn about each other while working together and thus create a feeling of community. This helps them develop greater confidence in speaking together.

Conclusion

Of course, the easiest way to create a positive atmosphere is by engaging student interest. Teachers of young children use games, media, and realia to capture and maintain student attention. However, there is a trend at some universities to stress academic content objectives which are often beyond the language abilities of most students. Striking a balance between these lofty goals and student interest requires flexibility, imagination and patience. However, a positive classroom ambiance

can be a motivating factor for students. As McInnis (2000) writes, "Increasingly, language educators are committed to the belief that the teaching of caring communication skills is crucial."

This article considered the implications of classroom ambiance on student learning. After considering the negative factors, it suggested ways that teachers can develop a closer relationship with students. These included using Japanese expressions occasionally, talking with students on a personal level, avoiding forceful behaviour when dealing with classroom management issues, encouraging student participation through group work, and reducing teacher tension through meditation. This article proposed that by exploring these ways, teachers may create a classroom ambiance that enhances their students' ability to learn a foreign language.

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Appendix 1: Relaxation Exercises

Relaxation is important for many reasons - it helps us enjoy life and get over boredom or difficulties we face daily. It is also vital for our physical, mental and emotional health. We can perform better when we relax and use our energy more effectively. It can also save us in dangerous situations when we remain calm but alert.

Even in class it can help to stay relaxed while practising speaking in English - it is

easy to get tense and confused when we try to speak a foreign language. Remembering to relax can change the atmosphere from being tense and serious. Learning improves when we have fun while trying our best.

Here are a few ways to relax - try them in your spare time and practise them often, especially whenever you feel tired, upset, or tense:

1) Close your eyes and imagine a beautiful natural scene, for example, a tropical beach or a picnic by the river etc. Picture yourself in the scene enjoying yourself with friends or just relaxing in the sunshine etc. Breathe slowly as you imagine how much you enjoy this experience. Breathe in the fresh air and notice how much energy each breath is bringing to your body and mind. Experience the sensation of warmth and relaxation.

2) Concentrate on your heart - notice how it moves as you breathe. Slow your breathing and feel your heart slow down. Feel the warmth in your heart as you allow the sun's bright energy to enter and revive your spirit. Concentrate on this bright energy as you breathe and notice that it enters and expands inside you until

it fills up your body. It brings healing everywhere and you feel great strength and calmness throughout your body and mind.

3) Feel a pulse of energy in your hands. Notice this pulse gets stronger when you think about it. Feel how it connects both hands and then imagine a ball between your hands. Hold the ball with your hands and feel its energy by imagining that it is turning around and around. Now you can place this ball anywhere in your body where you feel tense and use it to relax and get rid of pain. Try expanding the ball until it covers your whole body. The ball turns around in a clockwise direction just like the earth.

Good luck! If you have any questions, please ask me to explain.

IMPROVING PRE-SERVICE ENGLISH TEACHER TRAINING: LEARNING OBJECTIVES AND LEARNING PERSPECTIVES

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Introduction

Pre-service teacher education and training

determines not just the quality of future in-service teachers, but also the character of education as a whole. Teaching a foreign language is difficult, demanding training which addresses pedagogical understanding, target language grammatical knowledge, oral proficiency, and target culture awareness. However, Powell (1997) noted an increasing shift in ESL/EFL acquisition research, from a focus on pedagogy, the teacher and the mechanics of teaching, to a focus on learning, the student and the process of learning. This paper considers what constitutes important teacher training curricular elements of this shift specific to Japan.

The survey

A five-point Likert-type survey was used to illuminate similarities and differences regarding the objectives of English education and conceptions of effective English education between participants in English teacher training and English education in Japan. The survey respondents were: (1) university faculty in English education departments (hereafter designated as UFAC: n=31, 48% return); (2) high school English teachers (HST: n= 86, 76% return); (3) junior high school English teachers (JST: n= 55, 53% return); (4) high school English students (HSS: n= 763); (5) junior high school English students (JSS: n= 406). The survey consisted of an 'Educational Objectives' section and an 'Effective