

more analytical, and more independent, learners.

To conclude, I would tend to concur with Wenden (1987) when she talks of the necessity of combining training with language-learning. I also believe that Flavell (1979) makes a useful point when he refers to overmonitoring paralysing activity. In other words, I think that sole focus on learning a skill (labelled 'navel-gazing' in the title) is demotivating for the majority of students. Skills can be acquired subconsciously if the teacher provides the right conditions for learner independence - in this case by allowing students to play the role of the teacher.

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Teacher as learner; students as ... more themselves?

Richard C. Smith

"Through dialogue the teacher-of-the-students and the students-of-the teacher cease to exist and a new term emerges: teacher-student with students-teachers. The teacher is no longer merely the-one-who-teaches, but one who is himself (sic) taught in dialogue with the students, who in turn while being taught also teach. They become jointly responsible for a process in which all grow." (Freire, 1970 / 1996: 61).

Introduction

This short article is about one attempt to overcome the division between "school knowledge" and "action knowledge" (Barnes, 1976: 81), and about what happens when "the barriers that traditional educational structures can so easily throw up between learning and living" (Little, 1991: 11) are gently broken down. It is also, to some extent, about my own search for an appropriate role as a native speaker English teacher anxious to avoid linguistic and/or cultural imperialism (cf. Phillipson, 1992; Pennycook, 1994) in a non-western context, Japan.

What I shall do is offer some perspectives, or "scenes," representing - in a way - the beginning and end (then beginning again!) points of my current practice with students studying English at a university in Tokyo, adding in a few reflections on the way, but mostly letting the data "speak for themselves," and so - I hope - leaving space for your own reflections.

What are these students like?

Objective description (scene 1) : I look in through the windows of a classroom: students are arrayed in rows (desks are fixed to the floor); many appear to be taking notes as the (Japanese) lecturer speaks, but some (they later tell me) are working on unrelated things, while others are sleeping or looking out of the window. There are many empty seats at the front (students are bunched up at the back, while the lecturer sits on a raised stage, behind a desk, speaking through a microphone).

Objective description (Scene 2): A non-Japanese teacher is standing in the same classroom - a language lesson. He plays a tape at first, and then asks some questions, but there's little response, so he ends up answering many of them himself. "It's like getting blood out of a stone," he thinks (I know - I used to be this teacher!). The teacher forms students into pairs and goes round telling them to speak to each other *in English* (this is an English class, after all!), and they do try - when he's nearby. There are colourful pictures of other foreigners in the textbook, and we are in the "real life" situation of buying hamburgers, but some students are working on unrelated things (so I tell them to imagine buying hamburgers instead). Some seem to want to sleep, but I wake them up. It's a long way to go, since most of them are bunched up at the back.

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Objective description (Scene 3) : The same classroom, but students have unscrewed and removed the seats, redecorated the walls, set up a bar, and pulled the curtains shut. It's seven in the evening and some students are playing blues on the stage, strutting their stuff behind the microphone, while others dance or drink and talk with friends or teachers who stroll in and out. This goes on every day and evening for a week in November - it's the university culture festival when (less objective description coming up):

"Corridors become narrow, crowded alleyways, and classrooms are restaurants or less salubrious "dives" in the maze of an international bazaar. There are no students, no teachers, no timetable, no insiders or outsiders, only a variety of people in a multitude of costumes, doing a multitude of things together - very few of which involve books or notepads!" (Smith, 1997).

Students organize everything:

"The students of the Department of Anglo-American Studies cordially request the pleasure of reception of our professors' visits to the British-style restaurant "Pastoral Kitchen" we open during the school festival. We did our best to turn the dirty, simple classroom into a nice and comfortable place. A visit will prove that we are not only excellent students but also the great managers of a restaurant." (invitation received, November, 1997).

Objective description (Scene 4): How are students engaging with English when they're not in class? Here are some of the answers they've given me since I started asking, about three years ago:

- * *Take part in E.S.S. (i.e. university English Speaking Society) activities*
- * *Listen to English songs (reading and studying the lyrics / singing along)*
- * *Listen to English medium radio*
- * *Watch English language movies on video (trying to ignore subtitles / noting down new words / writing comments / repeating "cool expressions" / comparing subtitles with what they actually say / looking at a published screenplay)*
- * *Watch English TV news programmes / documentaries / dramas (noting down new words)*
- * *Read English language newspaper*
- * *Read English novels / short stories*
- * *Surf the Web*
- * *Write email messages in English*
- * *Write to my pen pal in English*
- * *Translate Japanese newspaper articles into English*
- * *Write a diary in English*
- * *Overseas phone calls to my friends*
- * *Joint activities with international students (speaking in English)*
- * *Speak English in my part-time job (guide; waiter / waitress; baby-sitter; interpreter)*
- * *Teach English to my sister / friend*

* *Go the movie theater every Saturday and watch the same (English language) movie over and over again, trying to ignore the subtitles.*

* *Keep a "voice diary," recorded onto audio cassette*

* *Talk to myself in English*

All of these are voluntary activities, engaged in because these students want to learn. Why, then, doesn't all this energy (scenes 3 and 4) show itself in the normal classroom (scenes 1 and 2)? Perhaps, because it's constituted - represented in students' and the teacher's minds - as a classroom, an area with its own roles and rules of behaviour, divorced from students' lives "outside" (cf. Barnes, and Little, both cited in the introduction). As I hope I've clarified, Japanese students - or at least these students - are not passive or other-directed *all the time*, and if the classroom can be transformed for a culture festival, maybe it can also be reconstituted for a "festival" of language use and learning. At least, we can try....

What do these students want?

These students are unlikely, in the late 1990s, to come to any teacher with autonomous demands - they are too used to the "normality" of antithetical classroom arrangements. On the other hand, they exercise at least partial autonomy as language learners outside class (cf. scene 4), seem happy to behave in a self-directed manner in classrooms during the school festival (scene 3), and also - I have discovered - are willing to take on more control over their classroom language learning, when they have the opportunity, and when this opportunity is not "forced" upon them.

As I've described elsewhere (Smith, 1996), my current approach to weekly English lessons involves negotiation and facilitation of arrangements for self-directed (usually group-based) language learning during class time, combined with some one-to-one counselling in relation to outside-class learning (activities such as those in scene 4 above which students tend to have been carrying on anyway). Students are invited to clarify their personal learning goals, then plan, engage in and reflect on self-directed learning activities (both outside and - in collaboration with peers - inside class) over periods lasting about 4 weeks. A recurring whole class session every fifth week is the main arena for reflection, and for re-negotiation, via writing and private discussion, of overall learning arrangements, including - importantly, in the light of concerns about the appropriacy of learner autonomy in non-western contexts - consideration of whether to continue with self-directed classroom learning or engage in more conventional whole class instruction. Negotiated and reflective investment by students in their own learning gives rise to the following kind of classroom arrangement :

Objective description (Scene 5): Same classroom as above (more recently). I arrive, and students are spread

out, sitting in the groups they decided to form two weeks ago. Some have started work, others are chatting in Japanese. I go round clarifying what each group's plan is for this week's (hour and a half long) class. Here (taking a leaf out of Leni Dam's book (1996: 73)) are the groups and their plans, with numbers of students in brackets:

<u>Topic discussion</u> (4) (they'll discuss "living alone")	<u>Free conversation</u> (5) (they'll talk about whatever comes into their heads)
<u>Reading/discussion</u> (7) (they copied articles from "Newsweek" last week, and will discuss them today)	<u>Business English</u> (5) (they'll improvise a sales negotiation)

We've also commandeered the empty classroom next door, and there are two groups:

<u>Debate/discussion</u> (3) (they'll debate the proposition "Smoking should be banned")	<u>Watch TV drama</u> (7) (they'll help each other understand an audio recording one of them made of the drama they watched together last week).
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Another group is in an "AV" room, some distance away:

<u>Movies</u> (9) (they'll continue to watch the movie "Seven," and then will discuss it)
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And the last group is in my study:

<u>TV drama (with skit)</u> (9) (they'll share new words and phrases they noted down individually while watching last week, and will write an original skit using these words / phrases).
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Once I've made my first "round" and helped sort out some technical problems, I go round "visiting" once again. "What are you doing now?," "What are some problems you're having?" etc. are some questions I ask, or I observe or take part in discussion. Students are usually "on task" - I don't find I need to wake them up or encourage them to speak in English; and none of them are pretending to buy hamburgers (in fact, it's interesting to note how often students - even with the option of choosing from published self-access materials - elect to engage with "authentic" texts or tasks).

What, then, have I learned about my students over the last three years, through engagement in this kind of "pedagogy for autonomy"? At least, that they become increasingly interested in, and increasingly able and willing to plan, carry out and evaluate for themselves,

with some successes and some instructive failures, some suggestions from me, and some rejection of my suggestions, the following kinds of (mostly small group-based) classroom activity:

- * *Watch and discuss movies on video (sometimes transcribing scenes / attempting to write their own subtitles)*
- * *Watch and discuss TV news/documentaries*
- * *Watch and learn new expressions from TV drama (sometimes acting out scenes)*
- * *Listen to songs (transcribing / translating / discussing them)*
- * *Study and write poetry*
- * *Engage in free conversation*
- * *Listen to lectures (published materials)*
- * *Engage in debate or discussion of particular topics*
- * *Play and invent games in English (including quizzes)*
- * *Make video documentaries*
- * *Do and make crosswords*
- * *Write on individually chosen topics*
- * *Write guidebooks (to the campus, to areas in Tokyo)*
- * *Practice and perform short plays*
- * *Engage in interviews with foreigners (on campus, off campus)*
- * *Read and discuss newspaper or magazine articles*
- * *Translate comic strips into English*
- * *Write an original comic strip*
- * *Write and compile movie reviews*
- * *Pretend to be foreigners (off campus), and analyse reactions*
- * *Write / perform rap songs*
- * *Discuss radio ELT programmes (listened to outside class time)*
- * *Translate a short story into English*
- * *Analyse advertisements, and make an original advertisement*
- * *Role play business situations*
- * *Practise speed reading*
- * *Rewrite a bible story from the point of view of a participant*
- * *Prepare for commercial exams.*

Due to my own insecurities in the area of "letting go" of control, compounded by my concern not to "impose" autonomy on students (cf. Aoki and Smith, 1996), I have always tried to be careful regularly to offer up the whole idea of self-directed within-class learning to potential rejection. Over the last three years, students - with only rare exceptions - have always expressed a preference for continuing with and improving on self-directed arrangements. These consistent votes of overall support have convinced me - for the moment - that self-directed learning arrangements *are* appropriate in this particular context, and with these particular students (consulting students themselves is, of course, only one way of addressing doubts about the validity of autonomy in a non-western context, but I currently see it as the most important way). I feel that I have become less directive,

and more and more an active learner myself (as action researcher, or ethnographer), seeing my role as most centrally involving enquiry into and clarification of what *students* want to do, are doing, are planning and are thinking. This, after all, is the only way I can learn to avoid imposition of "alien values." Through dialogue about learning, and changes which occur as a result of dialogue (with other students, as much as with me, perhaps), students, in turn, seem to have become more as they are outside class....free-er, like me, of the need to play predetermined "classroom" roles. Mine is a partial, and perhaps rosily unscientific view, but I feel we are all learning, little by little, to become closer to ourselves...

Not a conclusion (instead, a student's view)

.... *What I realized and learned most (from the course) was that there were many ways to study English and it is I who should decide which way to choose for my own study. Besides, I have realized the importance of having clear goals in studying. Without any particular goal, it is difficult to choose which way to go. In this sense, I really learned a lot from this class. This experience certainly offered me an important lesson.*

This kind of class (thinking of the goal and the aim of studying English, making study plans all by ourselves) gave us chances to consider what each of us has to study. It also made us realize that learning English is our own desire and that the way of learning should be well considered by each of us. Usually, it is a teacher who decides what to teach according to his/her own aim of the course. Consequently, students tend to be passive in that kind of class and won't think of what they are taught for. They just follow the teacher as he/she teaches. I hadn't even noticed this boring system of English classes clearly until I took this class and got a chance to think of my aim of learning English. It was a great experience for me to find that there were much more ways to improve my English than I had expected. By working in groups, we could get other students' ideas for this issue.

..... *Although this kind of class has an advantage to help students study independently, it seems to have a disadvantage that the role of a teacher seems to become less necessary. A teacher doesn't have to make detailed lesson plans and talk during the whole lesson. It seems that it makes a teacher easy to hold the class, but I don't really think so. As long as a teacher teaches in front of the whole class, he/she can expect what students are supposed to acquire through the lesson. It is because the aim of the lesson is planned by the teacher him/herself and students just follow it. But in this kind of class, aims are set by each student and they work according to their own aims. Grasping every student's aim and seeing how they are doing is rather difficult for the teacher. He/she has to look students carefully to understand their ideas toward learning and give appropriate advice to them. I think it is important for the teacher always to be sensitive*

to students' needs and to think how their plans could be better." (Takamatsu, 1996, quoted with permission).

This article is loosely based on a presentation with the same title given at the IATEFL LI SIG Pre-Conference Symposium in the Colloquium on Teacher and Student Attitudes and Roles, April 1st, 1997. I've appended the summary handout prepared for the presentation itself, to provide another perspective / some statements you might like to respond to, and to end with some questions I'd be interested in hearing readers' own answers to (in future Independence articles, perhaps).

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Appendix (colloquium handout)

1. Negotiating pedagogy for learner autonomy in a non-western context.
* *Negotiation is a key to successful and appropriate pedagogy for learner autonomy.*
2. On teachers not "letting go" completely!
* *Teachers need to actively learn about / from their students in order to support their learning effectively.*
3. What can teachers as learners discover, and with what results?
* *Teachers can discover their students' potential when liberated from the constraints of cultures of formal instruction. This can be empowering for teachers as well as students.*