# Students As Teaching Resources

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## Introduction

When considering motivation in the classroom, one realizes how important this aspect is. Lile (2002) states that "motivation is the key to all learning." Quoting Peters (2000) he goes on to say that "if students are not given a reward or credit for their efforts, and no feedback is given to the students, then most students' intrinsic motivation would begin to decrease." Bordonaro (1990) discusses ways in which teachers can carry out activities to empower students to become stakeholders in their learning process. Speaking of organizations in general, she posits the idea that "a person will become an active part in an organization if his or her voice is heard". Tim Murphey, in an advertisement for the Japan Association for Language Teaching national conference writes that "creating and structuring successful interactive moments of language use ('Languaging') are perhaps the most empowering thing teachers can do for their students."

Consider now the students and classes that are taught in Japan. Is it possible that motivation and becoming active are key concepts? The same complaints about Japanese post-secondary students are heard over and over again: "Japanese students are too passive", "they have little or no motivation", "they are afraid of making mistakes and won't take any risks", and so on and so on. Is this really the case or are educators stereotyping our students and selling them short? Keeping Bordonaro's claim about empowerment in mind, is it possible for English educators to create an environment which will

increase motivation and in which students can become active participants? It is logical to believe that if teachers pay close attention to what students are doing or saying in class - if we can use means of working towards this end that are safe and comfortable for them - then student motivation will increase.

This essay looks at a feedback channel used in writing classes in the Integrated English Program (IEP) of the College of Literature at Aoyama Gakuin University. Following this, activities carried out at another university, which incorporate ideas for improvement suggested by students, will be looked at.

## Exit Slips

Although this is not an activity suggested or created by students, it nonetheless gives them a chance to give feedback about the course and to express their concerns. Houston (2010) believes that feedback "shows that you care, that you are concerned about how your students want to learn and want to see them improve." He goes on to say that "requesting feedback can make your classes more democratic...and "it allows the students' opinions to influence lesson planning." While the term-end survey is an important and useful form of feedback that helps in planning future classes, ongoing feedback is also critical.

The exit slip activity, which is very easy to undertake, was shared by the IEP coordinator Gregory Strong. A large envelope is put on a table near the back door of the classroom. Near the end of the class, students are asked to anonymously (a key point) write a comment or question about what was covered in the class on a piece of scrap paper which they put into the envelope as they leave. While some students write frivolous comments, such as "I'm hungry!" or "I like your neckties", others express concerns or questions about what has been covered in class. After reading the exit slips, concerns are addressed at the beginning of the following class. So that students don't get tired of this activity and to avoid monotony, it is better to do

exit slips every second or third class instead of every class.

## Letter to the Teacher Process

At another university, a twice weekly writing class is taught. The class tends to be very large with anywhere from thirty to forty students. With this large a group, writing journals would be very cumbersome and reading and responding to them would be a very daunting task. In lieu of them, students have a twenty minute block of time in one class in which they write a letter to the teacher which is read and then answered by the teacher before the next class meeting.

One problem encountered when carrying out this activity is that some students have no idea about what to write. To deal with this problem, ten topics are written on the blackboard on the letter writing day. Students are told that they can choose to write about one, some, or none - it is up to them. After doing this activity over several terms, a student suggested that it might be better to give the topics in the previous class so that the students would have a chance to think about them before writing the letter. Ever since then, topics are given in the previous class and the quality of the letters has improved as most students have a good idea about what they want to say in them.

## Hollywood Time

In a twice weekly speaking class, a textbook was used in which each unit began with a short two person dialogue. Students first listened to the dialogue either from the textbook c.d. or the teacher reading it. Students went over the dialogue, marking stressed syllables, blended words, and intonation patterns. Following this they did choral speaking.

After the aforementioned activities, students were divided into groups of three. Two students were chosen to be actors who were not allowed to use their textbooks. The other student became a director, whose job was to feed lines to the actors. The directors were told that

they had to consider mood, rhythm/stress and intonation. The groups would do the dialogue several times before changing roles. The activity continued until each student had a chance to act in both roles and be a director.

Sometimes there was a group that ended up with four students. In this case the extra student would trade off practicing as an actor or director. In one class a group of four students did something original. A director stood behind each of the actors and fed lines to him or her. From that time on, Hollywood Time has been done using two directors. The activity is more fun and students are even throwing in their own vocabulary and ideas. Student fluency and confidence has grown.

**Paper Chat**

In a new reading/writing class, students are put into work groups with six members. Once per week students are involved in Anderson's Book Club - an activity in which they choose, read, and return graded readers after entering the book information onto a chart which they have. Each group comes to a table where graded readers are placed to return a finished book and take out a new one.

In this situation it was important to find something that other groups could do before/after choosing their new graded readers. When doing the club for the first time, student groups were told to write a group letter while waiting. The groups did something different from what was expected. A group member wrote a sentence or phrase then passed the paper to the next student who did the same thing and so on. The product was similar to that found in online chat rooms or facebook. The chat papers were collected, read and commented on before being returned to the student groups in the following class.

## Conclusion

As mentioned earlier in this essay, motivation is a key concept in language education. Students need to feel that they are involved in something real in which they are stakeholders. To do this, it is important to know students well. Where are they from? What are their hobbies and interests? What are their concerns as youth in Japan? What activities are challenging but enjoyable for them?

Knowing students is important but it is also important to get their input and feedback and really listen to what they have to say. Teachers need to incorporate student ideas concretely in class. Students will get more of a stakeholder feeling which increases their motivation. When all is said and done, a positive attitude concerning the challenges of learning another language is the legacy we want them to have.

### References

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