

Communication in the Classroom

A 5 -Lesson Unit on the Process of Communication in the Classroom Environment

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INTRODUCTION

The materials you see in this poster were used in an EFL course for Japanese university freshmen. With total freedom in designing and executing the course, I chose to make it a content-based class on the process of communication. One of the units in the course focused on communication in the classroom environment. The major objectives of this unit were:

1. encourage students to observe the process of communication in their classes with special attention paid to student (including their own) and teacher behaviors
2. stimulate awareness of cultural influences on classroom interaction
3. raise understanding of what non-Japanese teachers may be expecting in terms of classroom interaction
4. promote consideration of how to overcome cultural differences in classroom interaction styles

Five 90-minute class periods were devoted to this unit.

SYLLABUS OF UNIT ON CLASSROOM CULTURE

Lesson 1: Communication in Classrooms

- A. Introduce the idea of "classroom culture" as described in Andersen & Powell (1982)
- B. Group task: Complete Survey of Classroom Interaction (1). Indicate frequencies for High school classes, university classes taught by Japanese, university classes taught by non-Japanese

SURVEY OF CLASSROOM INTERACTION

Mark the box that indicates what classroom interaction was like in your high school days.

(**Editor's Note:** I added in hypens to get Netscape to display the table correctly.)

| | Always | Usually | Sometimes | Rarely | Never |
|---|--------|---------|-----------|--------|-------|
| 1. The teacher asked the class questions. | - | - | - | - | - |
| 2. Students volunteered to answer the teacher's questions.< | - | - | - | - | - |
| 3. Students say their opinions freely in class. | - | - | - | - | - |
| 4. Teachers ask students to express their opinions. | - | - | - | - | - |
| 5. Students speak only when the teacher calls on them. | - | - | - | - | - |
| 6. Students tell the teacher in class when they don't understand. | - | - | - | - | - |
| 7. Students listen quietly when the teacher talks. | - | - | - | - | - |
| 8. Students listen quietly when classmates talk. | - | - | - | - | - |
| 9. Students speak loud enough for the whole class to hear. | - | - | - | - | - |
| 10. Students consult with classmates before answering teacher. | - | - | - | - | - |
| 11. Students are afraid to make mistakes. | - | - | - | - | - |
| 12. Teachers encourage students to risk making mistakes. | - | - | - | - | - |
| 13. Teachers give homework. | - | - | - | - | - |
| 14. Students do homework as directed. | - | - | - | - | - |
| 15. Students are over 15 minutes late for class. | - | - | - | - | - |
| 16. Students ask teacher for help. | - | - | - | - | - |
| 17. Students ask for the teacher's opinions in class. | - | - | - | - | - |
| 18. Students look at the teacher when s/he speaks. | - | - | - | - | - |
| 19. Students want to sit in the front rows of the room. | - | - | - | - | - |
| 20. Teachers ask students to discuss in groups. | - | - | - | - | - |
| 21. Students sleep in class. | - | - | - | - | - |
| 22. Students copy answers from others during tests. | - | - | - | - | - |
| 23. Teacher tries to use humor in class. | - | - | - | - | - |
| 24. Teacher looks at the students when talking. | - | - | - | - | - |
| 25. Teachers are easy to talk to after class. | - | - | - | - | - |

HOMEWORK: Complete Classroom Behavior Record and Evaluation Form (2)

CLASSROOM BEHAVIOR RECORD AND EVALUATION FORM

DATE:

***LOOK AT THE TEACHER DURING LECTURES AND DISCUSSION**

Was it easy for you to look at the teacher when s/he spoke? If no, why not?

Do you think it is good or bad to look at the teacher during lectures? Why?

***TAKE NOTES**

Were your notes helpful or not? Why?

***ASK RELEVANT QUESTIONS**

How did you feel when you asked the teacher a question?

How did the teacher respond?

Are you glad that you asked questions? Why or why not?

***VOLUNTEER TO ANSWER QUESTIONS**

How did you feel when you did this?

How did the teacher react to your volunteered answer?

Are you glad you volunteered answers? Why or why not?

***FOLLOW DIRECTIONS**

Were you successful in following the teacher's directions correctly? If not, why not?

***PAY ATTENTION IN CLASS**

Why it was difficult or easy to pay attention?

***TALK WITH THE TEACHER BEFORE THE LECTURE, AFTER THE LECTURE, OR AFTER CLASS**

When did you talk to the teacher?

How did you feel while you were talking with the teacher?

Are you glad that you talked with the teacher? Why or why not?

****WHICH BEHAVIORS DID YOU DO WELL?**

****WHICH DO YOU THINK YOU SHOULD TRY TO IMPROVE?**

****WHICH ARE THE MOST DIFFICULT TO DO AND WHY?**

Lesson 2: Classrooms in the US and Japan

A. Survey responses on *Classroom Behavior Record and Evaluation Form*.

Call on individuals to share some of their responses

B. Ask class to describe what happens in a "good" classroom

in Japan. Write descriptors on the board.

C. Describe to class what happens in a "good" classroom in America based on personal experience, common knowledge and Berko, et al (1989, pp. 49-52).

D. Group work: Compare frequencies checked on Survey of Classroom Interaction with other group members. Discuss similarities, differences, patterns, reasons.

Lesson 3: Culture Gap in Japanese University Classrooms

- A. Describe survey of preferences and observations of non-Japanese teaching EFL in Japanese universities.
- B. Review results of the survey; explain statistics and how to interpret them.
- C. Group work: Collectively attempt to understand data; exchange impressions, comment on the results.

Summary of Results:

Teacher Preferences of Student Behavior in Japanese EFL Classes

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The immediate purpose of this investigation was to gain a better understanding of student behavior in Japanese college-level EFL classes and NS (native-speaker)-teacher preferences of student behavior. Survey data was collected from 82 NS teachers at colleges in Japan. Respondents marked preferred and perceived frequencies for 25 student behaviors in their EFL classes, and were requested to add descriptions of desirable and undesirable classroom behaviors.

A t-test was used to compare paired scores of teacher-preferred frequencies (TP) and frequencies teachers perceived occurring in their classes (CB). TP and CB were found to be significantly different ($p < .05$) on all survey items.

| Desirable Behaviors | |
|------------------------------------|--|
| Interacting with Teacher | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. talk to teacher after lesson b. ask teacher's opinion c. include teacher in groupwork when (s)he stops to monitor d. suggest new or different class activities e. dare to disagree with the teacher or text and give sound reasons for opinions f. look at teacher when (s)he is talking |
| Interacting with classmates | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. initiate conversation in English B. show support for classmates C. willingly work in groups |
| General Classroom Behavior | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. Behave politely B. Smile, laugh, show feelings C. Try to follow directions D. Put energy into speaking tasks E. React verbally or nonverbally F. Try to use humor |

43 respondents entered descriptions of undesirable behaviors. There was more agreement among these responses than there was for desirable behaviors. Descriptions are listed below followed by the number of respondents who provided each.

| Undesirable Behaviors | |
|---|------------|
| Description of behavior | # of resp. |
| Sleeping in class | 20 |
| Doing homework for other classes or homework which should have been completed for the present class | 9 |

| | |
|--|---|
| Speaking Japanese during practice time for speaking English | 7 |
| Copying homework, answers on tests | 7 |
| Not listening, talking with classmates when the teacher is talking | 3 |
| Reading comic books, magazines | 3 |
| Not doing homework | 3 |
| Not bringing paper, pencil, dictionaries, to class | 2 |
| Coeds doing makeup and grooming themselves and others | 2 |

Means for CB and TP (N=82)

TP= Frequency preferred by NS-teachers

CB= Frequency perceived by NS-teachers of their students

5 = Always

4 = Usually

3 = Sometimes

2 = Rarely

1 = Never

Lesson 4: How to minimize classroom culture differences in Japanese university classes

- A. Poll class on how difficult it would be for them to engage in the behaviors preferred by non-Japanese teachers.
- B. Group work: How can non-Japanese teachers help their Japanese students engage in the behaviors they prefer? Write suggestions for a given problem and hand them in at the end of class.

HOMEWORK: Read excerpts of Andersen & Powell article "Intercultural Communication and the Classroom".(4) (See **References** below.)

Lesson 5: Practice asking questions in class

- A. Class opportunity to ask questions about anything related to assigned reading
- B. Content of reading reviewed
- C. Summary and review of the unit

REFERENCES

Andersen, J. F., & Powell, R. (1982). Intercultural communication and the classroom. In L. A. Samovar & R. E. Porter (Eds.), *Intercultural communication: a reader* (6th ed.) (pp. 208-214). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

Berko, R. M., Bostwick, F. & Miller, M. (1989). *Basicly communicating: an activity approach* (2nd ed.). Dubuque, IA: Wm. C. Brown.

Sasaki, C. L. (1993). *Teacher preferences of student behavior in EFL classes*. Unpublished manuscript.

Notes

1. Originated by writer for the present unit (1993).
2. This task sheet is modified version of Berko, et al. (1989), Practice 10 (pp. 53-54), created by the writer for the present unit.
3. Extracted from an unpublished paper by the writer.
4. Anderson & Powell, pp. 210-211.

ONE LAST COMMENT.....

It would be a gross lie to proclaim that this unit produced a turnaround in student behavior. Most of them remain passive in terms of verbal participation. I do not believe, however, that the unit was a waste of time. I do believe that it was successful in making students more sensitive to the teacher and themselves as cultural beings, the classroom as a cross-cultural communication environment. If nothing else, the unit served to make students cognizant of differences between "classroom culture" as we have experienced it in our respective societies. Yes, given the opportunity, I would enthusiastically do this unit again.

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<http://iteslj.org/>

| | Student Behavior | TP | CB |
|--|------------------|------|----|
| Speak audibly in English | 4.79 | 3.29 | |
| Try to use English as much as possible | 4.72 | 2.53 | |
| Seek clarification from teacher | 4.71 | 2.4 | |
| Do assigned homework | 4.64 | 3.41 | |
| Listen quietly to classmates | 4.63 | 3.1 | |
| Verbally indicate not understanding | 4.53 | 2.35 | |
| Take risks, be unafraid to make mistakes | 4.5 | 2.53 | |
| Volunteer to answer teacher's questions | 4.5 | 2.1 | |
| Readily volunteer to share opinions | 4.41 | 1.84 | |
| Listen quietly when teacher speaks | 4.4 | 3.8 | |
| Initiate interaction with teacher in English | 4.37 | 2.68 | |
| Ask teacher for help | 4.35 | 2.74 | |
| Respond to teacher spontaneously | 4.27 | 2.53 | |
| Make needs in classroom clear | 4.2 | 1.9 | |
| Independently extend practice tasks in class | 4.17 | 1.99 | |
| Respond to teacher w/out consulting others first | 4.1 | 3.05 | |
| Relaxed when teacher monitors | 4.05 | 3.24 | |
| Show nonverbal signs of not understanding | 3.51 | 3.15 | |
| Mimic what teacher says or does | 2.55 | 2.33 | |
| Wait to be called on before speaking | 2.5 | 4.19 | |
| Rely more on classmates for instruction than on teacher | 2.42 | 3.36 | |
| More comfortable w/ structured than loosely structured tasks | 2.3 | 3.6 | |
| Avoid sitting in front rows | 1.63 | 3.24 | |
| Resist doing tasks w/students other than friends | 1.56 | 2.63 | |
| Over 15 minutes late for class | 1.44 | 2.4 | |