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**Community, Identity, Motivation**

# Creating an L2 community in an L1 environment

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Every English teacher hopes to persuade students to use English outside the classroom, but many learners find it impossible to do this in an environment where they feel they will draw attention to themselves. The World Plaza at Nanzan University's Seto Campus, funded through a Gendai GP (Good Practice) Grant sponsored by the Ministry of Education and Science, attempts to provide a focal point for the development of an English-speaking community. With its motto of 'Bringing Language to Life', it is a place where students can take the step from being English learners to being English users. The main aims of the World Plaza are to create a foreign language communication space and to facilitate development of an L2 community in an L1 environment. This paper will explain the aim of the project and outline an attempt to establish an English speaking community in a Japanese university.

英語教員なら誰でも、生徒達に教室外でも英語を利用してほしいと思っている。しかし、生徒達の多くは回りの視線が気になる環境の中では、それをためらってしまう。南山大学瀬戸キャンパスにある文部科学賞の現代GPの助成金によって設置されたワールドプラザは英語での交流に焦点をあて、Bringing Language to Life®をモットーに、生徒達が英語を学ぶ者から英語を利用する者へのステップを踏む事のできる場所である。またワールドプラザの狙いはLanguage Interaction Spaceの構築すること、そしてL1環境の中でのL2コミュニティの発達を進行させることである。従って、本稿ではこのワールドプラザのプロジェクトの狙いと日本の大学で英語を話すコミュニティを立ち上げる試みの概要を説明することを目的とする。

## Self-learning programs

**S**elf-learning programs are becoming increasingly popular in foreign and second language programs because they encourage students not only to become independent learners, but also to improve the quality of their linguistic output (Sarwar, 2001). For many teachers, getting students to use English outside the classroom is central to their overall teaching aims (Barker, 2004). In foreign language contexts, however, Brown observes, “students do not have ready-made contexts for communication beyond their classroom” (2001, p. 116). Japan is such a context. Moreover, Japanese students are highly sensitive to their environment, and it is very difficult for even the keenest students to use English in a situation where they feel they are drawing attention to themselves. For a long time, the typical Japanese learner has been characterized as being over-dependent on the teacher, even in English language classes. This is a barrier to progress in learning a second or foreign language where success depends on individual pursuit of opportunities for language use outside class. It is thus incumbent on teachers, planners and/or innovators to help students become aware of the value of using English outside the classroom and to make efforts to create opportunities for this where they don’t exist.

The World Plaza at Nanzan University Seto Campus is an attempt to provide a focal point for the development of an English speaking community in the university environment. It is a place where teachers hope students can speak English without worrying about what everyone around them is thinking. This paper explains how this resource was set up and how it can be integrated into the general

English program for non-English majors in the faculties of Policy Studies and Mathematical Sciences/Information Engineering.

## The World Plaza at Nanzan University, Seto Campus

The World Plaza is a one-room-space created within the Seto Campus of Nanzan University as a step to try to create an L2 community within an L1 environment. It is a foreign language communication space where, in principle, you can speak any language other than Japanese. At the moment, the focus is on English, taught as a language of international communication to all students at our campus, but in which realistic contexts for communication beyond the classroom are limited. Hence, the WP is an attempt to deal with the problem which all language programs in EFL contexts face: How to help students make the step from being English learners to being English users?

Autonomy has become something of a buzzword in language teaching in recent years, and the importance of self-access centers and independent learning resources has grown tremendously. This can be seen from the proliferation of papers, books, conference presentations and, as Gardner and Miller observe, “an increase in the incorporation of self-access as a component of teacher education” (1999, p. 1). Most resources, however, especially those aimed at Asian learners, tend to focus on language learning through individual study exercises, and it is not always easy to include a speaking area into the design. In fact, Littlewood’s (1996, cited in Gardner and Miller 1999, p. 42) list of predictions about Asian language learners includes their inclinations to form and work in groups as a possible hindrance to cultivating learner

autonomy. The World Plaza at Nanzan Seto, on the other hand, is unique in that it is perceived as an English interaction space. We encourage rather than stifle speaking in order to give students opportunities to practice language in real, meaning-making contexts.

### *World Plaza users*

The targeted users are all students at Seto Campus. There are a few speakers of English as a second or foreign language, all from other Asian countries belonging, like Japan, to the so called Expanding Circle of English use (Kachru, 1994). There are also a few returnees—children of Japanese families returning from overseas assignments—who are usually fluent speakers of English. Furthermore, given that the students at our campus are all non-English majors, the WP aims to help students with a wide range of needs and interests to improve on and maintain their levels of English and for the first time to take steps towards becoming English users.

### *World Plaza developers*

The NEPAS (Nanzan English Program at Seto) teachers who conceived and set up the World Plaza continue to work to ensure its smooth running and relevance to the needs of users and the goals of the English program. The World Plaza Assistants (WPAs) are fluent or near-fluent non-native speakers of English (Uzbek, Ugandan, Japanese) whose job is to take care of the day-to-day running of the World Plaza and to act as role models for students. In addition to the WPAs, there are also student helpers known as ‘World Plaza Leaders.’

The developers of the WP view self-access as an opportunity for students to learn and practice the kind of language they need and want, which in many cases involves speaking. In contrast to the traditional self-access center approach of providing resources to students who want to study individually, the World Plaza attempts to treat students as its main resource. The system, which is being continually modified in response to daily experiences, is based on the principle of ‘resource light, activity heavy.’ Whereas most self-access centers rely on a bank of resources to facilitate self-directed learning, we use very limited resources and provide a wide range of activities with an emphasis on speaking.

### *World Plaza activities*

The WP weekly schedule has been designed with the aim of providing students with realistic contexts for using the language they have learned in class. Each day (Monday to Friday) has 3 major slots open for various activities (see figure 1 below).

Day Time	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
Morning 10:00 – 13:00	EASE 気軽に英語相談 ・練習タイム	ENGLISH DIARY CLUB 英語で日記を書こう	EASE 気軽に英語相談 ・練習タイム	TRAVEL CLUB トラベル英語、トラベル計 画・経験談、旅について英 語で話そう	LEARNING ENGLISH WITH COMPUTERS WPAと一緒にインターネ ットを使った英語学習法 を学ぼう
English Lounge Activities 13:15 – 13:45	ENGLISH CONVERSATION LOUNGE 明るい「英会話」ラウンジ 初級者・上級者みんな大 歓迎!	NEWS HOUR 先生やスペシャルゲストと 一緒にニュースやホットな 話題について討論しよう	BEGINNERS' PARADISE 先輩やWPAが親切に英 会話の基本を教えてくれる	MY WORLD, YOUR WORLD 毎週スペシャルゲストの面 白い話を聞きに行こう	INTERNATIONAL DAY 留学生との交流で、世界と 世界の言語を知ろう
Afternoon 14:00 – 18:00	ENGLISH DEBATE CLUB 先生の司会で、英語のデ イバートをしよう	DVD TIME 先生・学生・ゲストが紹介 する面白いDVDを見よう	EASE 気軽に英語相談 ・練習タイム	EASE 気軽に英語相談・練習 タイム	FREE STUDY OR PRACTICE 先生の準備時間なので、 セルフスタディーだけの 時間です

Figure 1: World Plaza Weekly Schedule

### Morning activities

The 10:00am-1:00pm slot is shared between EASE (English Advisory Service) on Mondays and Wednesdays, the English Diary Club on Tuesdays, the Travel Club on Thursdays, and Learning English with Computers on Fridays. In EASE sessions, the WPAs advise students on language learning strategies and answer questions about English. Students also learn from other students' experiences about studying abroad, home stays and other topics of interest related to language learning. The English Diary Club on Tuesdays is a time for students to exchange, peer check, and talk about the contents of their diaries and journals. Students are encouraged to ask follow-up questions on diary records in order to develop speaking skills in addition to the writing

skills enhanced through peer checking and conferencing. The Travel Club on Thursdays is an opportunity for students to share their travel experiences and get information about prospective destinations for study-abroad programs and home stays. The Friday slot for Learning English with Computers is set apart for students working on English projects to get tips from WPAs and leaders on how to study and conduct research in English using the Internet. We hope students will benefit from learning the do's and don'ts of Internet research in particular and from Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) in general. All these activities are designed in such a way that they help learners to process language for meaning in specific contexts.

### *Lunchtime activities*

English Lounge Activities between 1:15pm and 1:45pm are run on a different theme every day and are the core of the dynamics of WP interaction and our L2 community building. They underline the aforementioned principle of *activity heavy, resource light*. The activities are held during lunchtime on campus, and students and teachers are free to bring their lunch and eat in the WP while taking part in these activities. The English Conversation Lounge on Mondays, which has *Nice To Meet You* as its catch phrase, is the epitome of what the WP is all about: creating an opportunity for (especially) Japanese learners of English to talk to each other without worrying about what everyone around them is thinking. Students speak about a variety of topics to other Japanese and foreign students, to WPAs and to teachers.

In Tuesdays' *News Hour* teachers pair up, sometimes with advanced students, sometimes with each other, to discuss and debate issues in the news. The goal of this activity is to give learners a chance to listen to live, authentic language as used by native and/or fluent speakers of English. Participants are always encouraged to contribute to the debates and discussions at this slightly higher and challenging level.

The Wednesday slot is *Beginners' Paradise*. Beginners and students who lack confidence are encouraged to come and meet and talk to fellow students, World Plaza Leaders and World Plaza Assistants. They all serve as role models and a source of encouragement to these learners. The Japanese role models are of particular significance to the linguistic development of other Japanese beginners. They act as role models; peers who are from the same culture, near the learners' age, social and professional level, and who for

some reason they may respect and admire (Murphey, 1996). We aim here at a quality interaction in which students not only learn from each other but also inspire each other.

*My World, Your World* on Thursdays features (mainly) guest speakers from outside our university, who usually talk about their own environments, life and work experiences. They cover a wide range of topics which connect with many of the issues students will meet in the course of their major areas of study. Students who attend these mini-lectures are given the opportunity to enhance their knowledge of core content areas while developing listening and speaking skills.

*International Day* on Fridays is foreign students' day. Students from Thailand, the Philippines, South Korea, China, and Taiwan talk about their own countries and share their ideas about various socio-cultural issues related to their countries of origin. Students are thus able to discuss issues in English and widen their view of the world.

### *Afternoon activities*

The 2pm to 6pm slot is designed in such a way that speaking is an element in attracting students to and making them familiar with the WP. *English Debate* on Mondays is an opportunity for students to practice speaking English through debating. WPAs prepare debates and also teach students the rules of debating and the proper approach to presenting arguments. Debates provide a rich stimulus for communicative interaction. *DVD Time* on Tuesdays is a chance for students to watch English sitcoms which are a very effective resource for English learners. Students are encouraged to share their impressions about what they

have watched, which is another chance for them to use the language. Moreover, they listen and learn while relaxing at the same time. Wednesday and Thursday slots are devoted to EASE again while the Friday slot is free time intended for WP Assistants to review the week and prepare for the next. All in all, the WP weekly schedule is designed to reflect the *activity heavy, resource light* principle.

### Towards community building

While the driving force behind this project is developing personal responsibility and autonomy among learners, there is also a strong desire on the part of NEPAS teachers to create a community of language learners. One of the main purposes of setting up the World Plaza was to develop a learning community that is comfortable and welcoming for beginners. WPAs are therefore always present to ensure learners of all levels are accommodated. We also have student helpers (WP Leaders) whom peers may feel more comfortable approaching.

Through the various events and activities, the World Plaza is gradually becoming a sharing community. The WP users share knowledge and learning experiences as well as stories and opinions. We call ourselves an English interaction space because we put more emphasis on learner interaction, as the description of our activities shows, in order to ensure maximum language output.

One more aim is to build an international community. We exploit the nature of the university community – the diversity of national backgrounds of both developers and users – to develop a truly international community of users of

English as the lingua franca of international communication. Each nationality brings an invaluable contribution to the communities of learners. The varieties of English spoken in different countries are shared and legitimized through interaction.

### Learner motivation

Motivating learners to use English in an almost 100 per cent L1 environment is one of the most challenging problems facing foreign language learning and teaching. We do not have space here for a discussion of the issues involved in motivating students to learn and use a foreign language, but it is worth mentioning that we originally adopted the *carrot and stick* approach to introduce (especially) beginners to the WP. Students who come in to do teacher-assigned World Plaza Activities (WPACs) are given points on their WP point cards (popularly known as WP Passports; see Appendix 1).

Attending events is one thing students can do as an optional activity to contribute towards their final English class grades. Many come back on their own because they realize that with or without teacher-assigned homework, this environment is good for developing their English. For advanced learners, returnees and foreign students, the *no Japanese* rule is enough to attract them to the WP, as they are motivated by the desire to maintain their English levels. Many of them are also driven by instrumental motivation – a real desire to learn English in order to attain career, educational or financial goals (Brown 2001). The wide range of WP activities outlined above is meant to be another source of motivation for students to come to the WP. We see in these activities a chance to widen student knowledge both of

the global society and of core content issues. Students can for example meet and talk to foreign students from countries covered by the Nanzan Asia Program (NAP), which is one of the main off-campus (overseas) projects of the Faculty of Policy Studies.

### Conclusion

In this summary of our presentation at JALT 2006 we set out to outline the activities that take place in the World Plaza, and to show how the emphasis is put on interaction as a way of helping students take the step from being English learners to being English users. Through our daily activities, through the kind of themes we choose for discussion and through the speakers we invite, we strive to help our users customize their language learning to their individual needs and specific academic contexts. Our real challenge, in the future, is to integrate WP activities more effectively into the overall language curriculum.

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