Exploring language teachers' non-judgmental stances

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There is a critique of teachers by Allwright and Hanks (2009) asserting that teachers always give detailed instructions when directing their students over the course of a task. This kind of judgmental stance can apply to both positive and negative behaviors; either may limit the dynamics of the teaching-learning process (Gebhard & Oprandy, 1999). If this is the case, to broaden teacher awareness of classroom interaction, non-judgmental stances where teachers do not impose their opinions and beliefs on students could be employed. Using principles of Exploratory Practice (EP) (Allwright, 2003), we collected data from one English classroom in Japan through video, focus groups and interviews. We analyzed and interpreted these data implementing the *Take 1, Take 2, Take 3* procedure by Fanselow and Barnard (2006). In this paper, we report mainly on the study's interpretation phases, discussions and the meaning behind collaborative studies.

教室内における大部分の活動の決定権は教師にあると言われている（Allwright & Hanks, 2009）。教室内活動の見識を広げるため、教師が生徒に対して意見や信念を押し付けない、つまり非断定的判断の立場を実践してはどうだろうか。断定的判断の立場とは、肯定的・否定的どちらの行動を取った時であっても当てはまるとされ、教育・学習の過程を制限してしまう可能性があると言われている(Gebhard & Oprandy, 1999)。そこで私たちはExploratory Practice (Allwright, 2003)を実践しながら、録画、グループインタビュー、個人インタビューを利用してデータを集めた。またそれらのデータは、Take 1, Take 2, Take 3 の段階を踏み、分析・解釈された（Fanselow & Barnard, 2006）。本論は特にこの研究のデータ分析、解釈、そして共同研究の意味について焦点を当てる。

We first met each other when we were searching for a "better way" of teaching, as we were not satisfied with our teaching and afraid of stagnating professionally. Our combined experiences in the English language classroom totaled 18 years (Takaaki with10 years in a public high school context, and Wayne with eight years in a range of different contexts--English conversation school, university, and private business. We had differences--age, nationality, experience, culture, race, belief--however, we had one thing in common: the desire to explore our teaching. This desire was coupled with an awareness that researchers and teachers (we use the terms interchangeably) in our area of Japan (Akita Prefecture) have few opportunities to get together and talk about their daily work. For us this was unsettling because more and more researchers recognized the usefulness of collaboration in fields such as psychology and anthropology (e.g., Harkness, Moscardino, Bermudez, Zylicz, Welles-Nystrom, Bloom, Parmar, Axia, Palacios & Super, 2006). Researchers in the teaching profession

have also discussed collaboration, whether between native/non-native speakers of English, practitioners/researchers, or supervisors/supervisees, and found many advantages associated with collaborative study (e.g., de Oliveira & Richardson, 2004; Hargreaves, 1994; Matsuda & Matsuda, 2004; Nunan, 1992). Two specific advantages that apply to this current study are that researchers can complement each other with their strengths and weaknesses, and they can apply different perspectives.

So with a basic common ground we united as research partners in pursuit of adding to the documented successes involving collaborative studies. We then decided to focus our study on the actual practice in which teachers and students are engaged because according to John Fanselow (personal communication, August 30, 2010), some people outside the field of teaching consider teachers to be patronizing and condescending. Allwright and Hanks (2009) support this view believing that students are always directed with great detail how to engage and complete tasks even though they can function autonomously. We consider these observations and assertions troubling. Turning the critique on ourselves we decided to explore our own teaching stances and beliefs by documenting and presenting what happens in our classrooms.

We attempted to look closely at Takaaki's first year public high school classroom in order to broaden teacher awareness of classroom interaction in this context. (Note: While documenting the classrooms of both practitioners, we chose to present Takaaki's because of the voluminous amounts of data collected, the need to explore that data in depth, and obvious article word limitations. A forthcoming release of results from a university context will take place in the near future.) Takaaki focused his teaching on exploring what Gebhard and Oprandy (1999) call *non-judgmental stances.* To make the teaching/researching environment participatory and inclusive we used the principles of Exploratory Practice (EP) (Allwright, 2003) to guide the study. These concepts will be defined and elaborated on in the following literature review. We will then consider the *Take 1, Take 2, Take 3* (Fanselow & Barnard, 2006) procedure used to interpret the chosen segments of the classes. We believed this methodology allowed us to express our authentic and unique voices because primarily that is what the procedure demands. The paper then moves on to describe Takaaki's classroom by presenting time-coded transcripts of two intact classes as well as our interpretations of those intact classes. Our discussion and concluding remarks sections summarize the paper while listing the characteristics and immediate definition of teacher non-judgmental stance that we feel can be derived from the study. This is our attempt to explore a subject that, in our opinion, has been under-explored in a language-teaching context.

Literature review

Non-judgmental stances

For the purposes of this study we focused on literature referring to non-judgmental stance stemming from Gallwey (1974), and Gebhard and Oprandy (1999). Gallway (1974) observed tennis players making vague and value-laden comments about themselves. We found ourselves doing the same with our teaching. Gallwey (1974) emphasized the necessity for us as human beings to be freed from cursory judgments. Literature pertaining to language teaching brings Gallway's (1974) observations and assertion into this study's context. Scholars support the notion that teachers are believed to be constantly imposing their judgments, good or bad, on their students (Fanselow, 1987, 1988; Gebhard & Oprandy, 1999; Stevick, 1980). Gebhard and Oprandy (1999) specifically touch upon this phenomenon when they talk about broadening teacher awareness of classroom interaction by taking non-judgmental stances. Accepting this behavior, teachers would not articulate their opinions and beliefs. The

intention is to understand how both positive and negative behaviors may limit the dynamics of the teaching-learning process (Gebhard & Oprandy, 1999). Instead of making judgments based on impressions and single perspectives (Fanselow, 2011), teachers can try looking at actual classroom behaviors with the goals of reducing biases and describing them as they are.

Exploratory Practice (EP)

One of the early works involving Exploratory Practice (EP) is Allwright and Lenzuen's (1997) article describing their accounts of work done at the Cultura Inglesa, Rio de Janeiro to develop practitioner research methods. Since then, EP has been widely utilized in various contexts (e.g., Rose, 2007; Rowland, 2011; Wu, 2006; Zhang, 2004). For the purposes of this study we chose to use the literature from Allwright himself to try and remain as true to his ideals as possible.

Exploratory Practice is an indefinitely sustainable way for classroom language teachers and learners to develop their own understandings of life in the language classroom, while doing the business of learning and teaching (Allwright & Lenzuen, 1997; Allwright, 2003, 2005). Using EP, teachers and learners work together to understand aspects of their classroom that puzzle them, while using normal pedagogic procedures (standard monitoring, teaching and learning activities) as investigative tools (Allwright & Lenzuen, 1997; Allwright, 2003, 2005). EP looks at language learners as people who 1) are unique individuals; 2) learn most effectively in social situations; 3) are capable of taking their learning seriously; 4) are able to make independent decisions regarding their learning; and 5) can develop as practitioners of learning (Allwright & Hanks, 2009). In short, EP does not aim to *solve* the *problem,* thus placing "right" or "wrong" labels on behavior. Instead, EP attempts to *understand* the *puzzle*, allowing for greater flexibility in exploring behavior resulting in an *enriched* classroom.

Methodology

The process of collecting data from Takaaki's classroom took place between September and December of 2010. From two fifty-minute classes that were videotaped we chose two five-minute clips for analysis. The five-minute clips were used to initiate focus group sessions that generated further data in the form of group and individual reflective statements. In addition, we interviewed several students as well as ourselves. This process of videotaping, choosing the five-minute clip, analyzing, organizing focus groups and interviews, and finally interpreting the data is considered to be one cycle. The next phase of this process provided the perfect opportunity to use our collaborative strengths.

We stated earlier that we had not observed many situations where teachers and researchers were able to meaningfully exchange, let alone collaborate, ideas and beliefs on a constant basis. This experience led us to collaborate. To utilize this aspect of our study we chose Fanselow and Barnard's (2006) *Take 1, Take 2, Take 3* approach to classroom analysis as a guide in helping to interpret these data. For *Take 1*, self-interpretation and critique, Takaaki examined all the collected data as well as relevant literature to craft an interpretation. This is the insider's view, from the practitioner who is familiar with the environment inside and outside of the classroom. For *Take 2*, the co-researcher's interpretation and critique, Wayne used these data, his experiences and intuitions to support his assertions. This take tries to give a live presence from *the outsider* perspective. And for *Take 3,* WE, the teacher/researcher's, are asking YOU, the reader, to give an interpretation based on the transcribed and time-coded classroom sessions in the upcoming data section. Finally, to categorize whether we were engaging in judgmental or non-judgmental behaviors we applied the explanation by Gebhard and Oprandy (1999) to our *Take 1* and *Take 2* interpretations.This process of *takes* allowed us to use our own voices in initially critiquing,

and now presenting our interpretations. The interpretations presented in this paper attempt to hold true to the initial interpretations crafted during the study.

Data: Transcripts and interpretations

Cycle 1

Transcript

25:01 – T: Did you finish writing? Did you finish writing your introduction? O.K. Can you please stand up here? This row? This row? This row? This roooow. Can you please stand up this row? No no. This row. Stand up. That row please stand up. Yeah, you can stand up. And with your notebook, with your notebook you wrote your introduction about, you move one seat behind. And the person who is sitting in the end, please come up here. What, what is your name again? Sorry. (11) What's your name again? Sorry. Maki, Maki can you please come up here? O.K.? And everyone else, please go back one seat, and then one seat. And the person in the end, please come up here with your notebook. And introduct…introduce yourself to your partner in English, k? Go. (clap) (28) {No student except one, Maki, moved. Students are looking around—some looking amused, confused, indifferent, upset…} One seat behind. Go go, yes yes. O.K. Introduce yourself to your partner. Go. (clap) (50) {some seem to be still confused, others start to introduce themselves, some talk to other pairs, some look at me, one went back to her original seat to grab her notebook} When you finish, please look at the teacher. When you finish introducing yourself, please look at me. Finished? Did you finish? Did you finish? No. No? O.K. Go go. What's your name?

28:24 – S: Daisuke

28:26 – T: Can you please stand up? Tell me your partner's name.

Figure 1. Takaaki's Cycle 1 classroom interchange

Take 1 by Takaaki

In retrospect, my reasons for students to change their seats by following my instruction might have been two-fold: to have students attentive to natural, meaningful English input and create an English-medium atmosphere in the classroom, and to have different partners and prevent atrophy for later activities. Thus, what is apparently noticeable first is that I spoke all the time except for one word, which was uttered by a student named Daisuke. I seem to be in a hurry and agitated, which I could detect from my pitch, tone, volume alternation and continuous repetitions of certain words. Some students appeared to be confused, upset or even indifferent as a result of my English-only instruction as well as the new idea of constant seat changes in an English lesson. Some did/could not follow what they were told to do.

In spite of the sudden change in the teaching style, many students were surprisingly in favor of this new lesson style. Takeshi, for instance, stated, "This class style is new and fun compared to the ones in junior high school" (reflection sheet, September 2, 2010), and Jun remarked "It is exciting because we feel like there is a foreign person in the classroom" (interview, September 6, 2010). Still, some expressed their frustration in their comments: "What is the point of changing seats all the time? I don't know what is expected from this" (Kayoko, reflection sheet, September 2, 2010), "I want you to use Japanese more because I don't understand anything, and this is a painful process for me" (Sayuri, interview, September 6, 2010). In this particular event, I was taking a judgmental stance in that I had certain preconceived beliefs that students could learn better and more if the medium used in the classroom was only English. At the same time, I was practicing a non-judgmental stance because I believed that students could handle the situation without explicit instructions in their first language.

Take 2 by Wayne

Takaaki seems to be quite demanding of his students. Whether he actually believes the students can complete the task at hand or not seems to be irrelevant, as he continues to have them do the same task. While his directions seem clear to me, from the facial expressions of his students they seem confused as to what they are supposed to be doing. Could they be trying to figure out his English, or could they be legitimately confused as to what to do? The body language of the students suggests varying degrees of interest. Some students seem to be going through the motions, while others seem to be engaging. Others, to me, looked confused. The focus of the activity was never explained to the students. Takaaki asks them questions about the introduction, but the task was not to ask questions. Could Takaaki have focused the students more by telling them the goal of the activity, or was the goal apparent? Based on these ideas, I believe he is taking a non-judgmental stance in his classroom. His actions, however, lead me to believe that he is imposing and overbearing towards his students. Could this make his classroom atmosphere a wholly judgmental one?

Take 3 by You, the reader (please use our bio data to send us your interpretations)

Cycle 2

Transcript

13:25 – T: One thing I would like you to remember is that…Let me speak in Japanese. Can I speak in Japanese? (3) Can I speak in Japanese? (5)

Ss: Yes

T: Yes? これ何て言うんだろう英語でって思ってる時が一番勉強してるがら、おめだぢの脳みそガンガンきてるがら、ビリビリきてるから。これなんていうんだろって思うどぎあんまりねえべった。普段。今までの授業でもあんまりねがったど思うんだよね。でもこれってなんて言うんだろ英語でって思ってみで。わがんねくてもいいがら気にしないで。最終的に日本語でもいいがら。うーーん、、、てfrustrationためで頑張ってるどぎ一番いいんだよ。Did I tell you the story when I went to Canada? カナダいった時俺めっちゃストレスたまって。（困った表情）ってなったのわがるべ。それがあったから今こうやって俺しゃべれるようになってるなだがら。んだがらこれってなんて言うんだろって思って。O.K. I will give you one minute again. This time, I want you to talk about either T.V. or movie. O.K.? Choose your topic either T.V. or movie and talk with your partner for one minute. Go.

(Translation) (Yes? In actuality, you can learn the most when you are wondering how I can say this in English. That's when your brain is working and connecting all the information in a rapid rate. You don't usually really think that way, do you? I mean you didn't have opportunities in previous English lessons. But please feel encouraged to think that way. Don't worry even when you cannot say things in English. Ultimately, you can use Japanese. Well…the optimal learning situation is where you think hard and accumulate your frustrations. Did I tell you the story when I went to Canada? I got so stressed out that I became like this…(facial expression, grimace), right? Because of that experience, I am who I am and able to speak English like this. So please remember to try thinking of how you can say such and such in English. (said in a serious but playful way)

14:53-S: (chatting with partners)

16:18-T: Sit down. (5) Takayuki, can you please tell me either about T.V. or movies for one minute?

S: Movie…

T: Ah huh, tell me more. Tell me everything!

S: Because!

T: Tell me everything!

S: Because movie is! Long time…(laugh)...

T: What's your favorite movie? One that…

S: Sekaino wa (part of the title of a movie)…

T: Sekaino wa (part of the title of a movie)?

S: Sekaino (part of the title of a movie)...なんだっけ?(what was it?) … Sekai no Chuushinn de Aiwo Sakebu (the title of a movie)…

T: Wow, I watched that too. When did you watch? When did you watch it?

Figure 2. Takaaki's Cycle 2 classroom interchange

Take 1 by Takaaki

Ending the first cycle (see Figure 1 for transcription) of the study, many of my students asked me to start using Japanese to enable them to understand more of what I was saying. Some students found the English-only class confusing and unproductive: "I want you to use Japanese from time to time," "I want you to speak English occasionally," "I want you to add Japanese after English" (Daisuke, Asami, & Mizuho, reflection sheet, October 29, 2010). An extreme approach one student suggested to me was that I say a sentence in English first, and then translate it into Japanese every time. I valued their comments and decided to use Japanese to a certain extent. On the basis of students' English learning experiences, I assumed that when students said they wanted me to use Japanese, students wanted me to make use of the grammar-translation method that appears to be prevalent in Japanese high school English classrooms. Lamie (1998) found that a significant number of teacher trainees received no training in communicative teaching methodology, and most of them are only familiar with grammar-translation approach. However, in my case, I decided to use Japanese depending on how complex and urgent I think the content of what I say to my students is. On one hand, I was non-judgmental because I took my students' suggestions seriously and implemented them in my classroom; on the other hand, I was judgmental because I used Japanese based on my own purpose--even though I asked for permission from students to use Japanese. Another point I would like to draw attention to is the nature of the discourse when I used Japanese. I consciously code-switched from Japanese to English as much as possible while speaking in order to maintain the English atmosphere, and not to lose the "moment." As a result, I went back to using English as soon as I made my points clear to students in Japanese.

Intriguingly, Cycle 2 (see Figure 2 for transcription) was the time when students began to take responsibility for their learning and make comments actively as opposed to passively as is evident in the following comments: "I want you to speak more English, since I don't usually have opportunities to be exposed to English, I think it is one way to learn English language," "I will be able to understand if I listen to English all the time," "The teacher doesn't have to change; we are the ones who have to change for learning English" (Yoko, Yushi, & Shizuka, reflection sheet, October 29, 2010). Another illuminating comment from a student sums up the gradual attitude change; "I started to study English for 2 to 3 hours a day at home. I thought I cannot only rely on the lessons to learn English well" (Takeshi, interview, November 4, 2010). Ultimately, what counts is whether or not students can become autonomous learners and think of their English learning in their own right instead of always depending on what teachers tell them to do. Being more aware of our actual teaching and learning seemed to have led to student development as well as my development; i.e. mutual development (Allwright & Hanks, 2009).

Take 2 by Wayne

This video segment portrays a very comfortable level of interaction between the students and Takaaki, as opposed to what was witnessed in the Cycle 1 video (see Figure 1 for transcription) where students were visibly apprehensive. In general, Takaaki really challenged the students to speak, and used topics the students could probably relate to--T.V. programs and movies. This was evident from the way he set up the activity--using his Japanese. He used Japanese not as a tool to clarify vocabulary or translate a sentence. Instead he used Japanese as a motivational tool. The students seemed to respond well. However, I gather they might have wanted him to use Japanese in the more traditional grammar-translation way.

After one minute, the conversation, as transcribed in Figure 2, between teacher and student was a rapid exchange of

broken English and cue-giving. Takaaki filled in many gaps, and seemed to be putting the words in the student's mouth, but more tellingly the student responded correctly to the cues. While a comfortable atmosphere was being depicted, and the student in the video seemed to be responding properly, Takaaki was controlling the flow of the conversation, and the student was trying to keep up. When I consider Gebhard and Oprandy (1999), I believe Takaaki used what I envision as judgmental techniques, not letting the student think for himself, allowing little wait time for responses, and controlling the flow of the conversation signaling a belief that the student cannot complete the conversation. Ironically, I feel this was ultimately helpful for the student, and his class to witness.

Take 3 by You, the reader (please use our bio data to send us your interpretations)

Discussion

The field of education for decades has seen many theories and methods come and go. With this coming and going of theories and methods there has also been a continuous debate over the prescribed method, technique, and activity we teachers are supposed to follow as well as to the unbalanced power relationship between teachers and students. A student-participant in this study acknowledged this paradigm when she said, "Teachers are God in the classroom" (Kanae, interview, September 6, 2010). Her experiences might have shaped her beliefs to allow for this statement. She perhaps believes that teachers are always in command of the classroom, and should probably be telling students what and how to learn. To broaden our perspectives as teachers and to genuinely value the experiences of our students, we assert that taking a non-judgmental stance is an effective way. Taking a non-judgmental stance should also help realize there is no best way to teach and learn. All of this we feel leads us to emphasize the importance of exploring our own classrooms and taking responsibility for what we actually do. The following summary will elaborate on this point of discussion.

Key to the discussion points raised in the preceding paragraph is non-judgmental stance, Exploratory Practice and *Take 1, Take 2, Take 3*. The literature informed us that non-judgmental stance allows for teachers to be more open because value judgments are not incorporated into classroom instruction. Exploratory Practice informed us how to create a participatory environment, which should have allowed a non-judgmental classroom to flourish, thus enriching our search for a better instructional process. Finally, *Take 1, Take 2, Take 3* gave us the direction, and separate voices needed to interpret the collected data in our own unique ways. These three facets allowed us as teachers and researchers to share this experience with our students, and extract interpretations we feel hold true to the classroom from which they were derived.

In the beginning, a lot of the critique and interpretation showed that students were uncomfortable speaking English, and Takaaki, a Japanese teacher of English, communicating solely in English might have been strange, imposing and somewhat confining. From our point of view, the fact the teacher spoke only in English throughout the first class of the school session was quite a shock for the students. However, the students seemed to gradually gain confidence in expressing themselves constructively, thus challenging the teacher to respond equitably (see Cycle 2 *Take 2* for reference). Takaaki did not yield to the traditional methods of teaching English in Japan (i.e., grammar-translation), but he did use Japanese as his students requested to take some license to create an open classroom environment (see Cycle 2 *Take 1* for reference). We feel this might have helped improve the interaction between the students and teacher ultimately leading to a participatory and mutually enriching learning situation.

This study investigated the actual language classroom while incorporating a non-judgmental stance based on literature from Gebhard and Oprandy (1999). That said, we want to go one step further by making a list of salient characteristics and immediate definitions of judgmental/non-judgmental stance that apply this study. Our raw data generated many ideas, themes and categories that we had to refine. And while the following list is tentative and incomplete, we hope it can open a window onto a new way of thinking about teaching and learning.

Characteristics of a judgmental stance:

1. Having preconceived beliefs about teaching and learning, and implementing them.
2. Controlling the flow of classroom activities and conversations.
3. Manipulating language use (L1/L2) for teacher benefit.

Characteristics of a non-judgmental stance:

1. Not giving explicit instructions.
2. Not stating the goal or purpose of classroom activity.
3. Valuing student comments and implementing them into successive lessons.

Thus, based on our reviewed literature, collected data, and research findings, we would suggest the following elaborated definition of *non-judgmental stance* for language teachers as having multi-dimensional teaching styles, fluid beliefs, and ongoing reflecting practices. This is in contrast to *judgmental stance*, where the language teacher is close-minded and unwilling to change their daily teaching to suit the needs of all classroom parties.

By continuously exploring a non-judgmental stance during actual classroom instruction, our hope is for readers to be cognizant of their possibilities and their students' potential. As a result teachers and students are more likely to take responsibility for what they do.

Concluding remarks

It is important to pay close attention to the intact classroom, the benefit being enhanced teacher awareness. In this paper, we aimed to achieve that elusive end by considering non-judgmental stance, utilizing EP principles. We made our voices and values apparent in the interpretation phase of the study, following the *Take 1, Take 2, Take 3* procedure. This was refined and reinforced in the findings section by laying out the characteristics and definition of language teachers' judgmental/non-judgmental stances.

Considering how busy teachers already are, and advocating the principles of Exploratory Practice, we strongly believe the process of understanding non-judgmental stances and classroom teaching should not be a burden for teachers; instead, it should be a continuous exploration. This exploration should be manageable and integrated into our daily teaching, as we have done here (i.e., limit the videotape session to twice a semester; use only five-minute clips for analysis and interpretation; and try to focus on one urgent topic--non-judgmental stance in our case). This type of study, which gave specific voice to all the participants, can be mirrored in different contexts (elementary schools, cram schools, university, etc.). Different groups of people (age, gender, English proficiency level, purpose, etc.) should be involved to further shed light on English language teaching and to empower each teacher and student.

We believe this collaborative study is a testament to the value of cross-cultural scholarship. Not only are we researchers

with different viewpoints, but we also have different cultural contexts--Japanese and US American. This undoubtedly led to interpretations and perspectives that would not have appeared if we shared similar cultural backgrounds. We sincerely hope what we have accomplished contributes to the language teaching and learning communities in culturally profound and insightful ways.

Bio data

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