

Lin, P. M. S. (2014). Investigating the validity of internet television as a resource for acquiring L2 formulaic sequences. *System*, 42, 164-176. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2013.11.010>

Peters, E. (2020). The effect of out-of-class exposure to English language media on learners' vocabulary knowledge. In S. Webb (Ed.), *Approaches to learning, testing and researching L2 vocabulary* (pp. 143-167). John Benjamins. <https://doi.org/10.1075/bct.109.itl.00010.pet>

Rodgers, M. P., & Webb, S. (2019). Incidental vocabulary learning through viewing television. *ITL-International Journal of Applied Linguistics*. <https://doi.org/10.1075/itl.18034.rod>

Werbach, K., & Hunter, D. (2012). *For the win: How game thinking can revolutionize your business*. Wharton Digital Press.

## [JALT PRAXIS] YOUNGER LEARNERS



### Mari Nakamura & Marian Hara

The *Younger Learners* column provides language teachers of children and teenagers with advice and guidance for making the most of their classes. Teachers with an interest in this field are also encouraged to submit articles and ideas to the editors at the address below. We also welcome questions about teaching, and will endeavour to answer them in this column.

Email: [jaltpubs.tlt.yl@jalt.org](mailto:jaltpubs.tlt.yl@jalt.org)

## Getting Young Learners to Speak Out in Class

Matthew de Wilde

[englishuplift.team1@gmail.com](mailto:englishuplift.team1@gmail.com)

In my capacity as a teacher-trainer and presenter at teacher-development workshops and seminars over the years, I have often shown video footage of my lessons to other teachers. At these times, teachers are very often surprised by how expressive in English my students appear to be. There is surprise that my students don't hesitate to use English, they don't display reluctance to interact with each other in English, and that they don't use Japanese in class. Lesson footage of my elementary school-aged students in particular attracts teachers' interest because lessons for this age-group are only once a week, and in other classrooms around the country this age-group often uses a lot of Japanese in class.

Through a large number of lesson observations over the years, and through conversations with other teachers, I have noticed a number of features of English language lessons in Japan.

1. Teachers often use Japanese in their lessons, and their students do, too.
2. Teachers often use English only in their lessons, but their students use Japanese.
3. Teachers often apply an "English only" rule in the classroom. The students however appear quiet, a little shy perhaps, and there is a general reluctance to speak out.

In all of these cases, most of the English that students say in the classroom is textbook English or "Target English" that is repeated or practiced. Students very rarely use English. It would seem that while teachers want their students to "communicate in English", in reality it's not really happening.

This short video (<https://youtu.be/nbeuZlMq3AA>) is a collage of some of my lessons. Although originally designed for the purpose of demonstrating examples of communication in the classroom, it serves this article well because students of a variety of ages are speaking out in class.

Because I have generally been able to get students to speak out in practically all of my classes, including those with so-called "shy" children, I'm often asked "How do you do it?"

I've always been interested in student *output*. I've always found it more interesting when students USE *their* English than when they *repeat the textbook* English. As a teacher, I am more inspired by students using English than students practicing English because I like to be surprised by how students express themselves. When students use English, it lets us know how effective we are as their teachers. Because of my obsession with students' output, I have identified the following three important factors that help students' output to develop and grow.

1. **An All-English class environment.** Details on how to create this can be left for another article, but it helps when students and teachers share a common attitude of "We study English, so we need to USE English inside the classroom, not Japanese."
2. **The teacher's care when reacting to and correcting students' errors.** This too needs not

be discussed in detail here, but teachers need to be aware that over-correction of students' mistakes often results in them reducing their output.

**3. The Non-Target English Approach®.** Now, let's discuss the Non-Target English Approach (NTE) because this is the most important factor in having students speak out.

It's imperative to understand that NTE is an "approach", not a "method". It's the essence of what makes communication happen, and so it can be utilized in conjunction with any teaching method. You may be familiar with the term "Target English". It refers to the English that the students "study", it usually appears in students' textbooks as English to be "drilled", "repeated", and "practiced", and it's the English that frequently appears "on the test". The NTE approach has the teacher trying to generate English from the students *other than* Target English.

The NTE Approach is rooted in a belief that children tend to speak out when they want to and *need* to express something. The former is difficult for the teacher to do much about because the student's own motivation controls their expression. The latter, however, the *need* to speak out, can very easily be stimulated by the teacher through the creation of situations in the classroom that trigger the need for the students to respond.

Perhaps the best introduction to the NTE approach is to understand how it was conceived in the first place. Together with a colleague of mine, a very talented teacher called Ron Martin (Ph.D) in the early 2000s, I was watching video footage of a recent lesson I had taught at a public elementary school. During the lesson, something intriguing happened. Its significance went unnoticed during at the time of the lesson, but it caught our attention as we watched the video recording.

In the lesson, I was handing out a worksheet to the students. I had overlooked a student at the back of the classroom, and he didn't get one. That student's reaction to the situation, an energetic outburst of "Matthew-sensei! Paper, please!" struck us as being the only English from any of the students that wasn't repeated or "practiced" within an activity. As we observed this moment in the video, we immediately understood the difference between *practicing* and *using* English in class. It dawned on us that our English education had mostly been focused on practice, thereby denying students adequate experience of usage.

In the lessons that followed that video observation, both my colleague and I decided to try to recreate the same situation. We deliberately "forgot"

to hand one student a worksheet, and sure enough it brought about the same or similar reactions from the students. Some students said, "Paper, please", but other students said, "Can I have a paper, please?" Some students said, "No paper!", but others said, "I don't have a paper!"

We realized that it doesn't really matter which expression the student chooses to use; the important thing is that the students were *using their own* English in a genuine way, for a genuine purpose, within a genuine (yet deliberately created) situation. With this, we decided to apply the same principle of "situation creating" at other times of our lessons, for the purpose of having students *use their English*, and this gave birth to the NTE Approach.

Consider this moment, a very common one, in English classrooms throughout Japan. The teacher says, "Open your textbooks to page 26, please". What happens? The students diligently and quietly open their textbooks to page 26. You may possibly hear certain students murmur "26 . . ." as they flick through pages. But that's about all.

Now, imagine what might happen if the teacher says, "Open your textbooks please." The students will likely begin flicking through the pages, but it will soon dawn on them that they don't know the page number. Before long, someone will say, "What page?" Here, the teacher has created a very simple need for students to speak out. By deliberately not providing the page number, students were placed in a situation whereby they *needed* to ask, "What page?" This is the core of the NTE approach; the teacher deliberately creates situations for students to speak out, to USE their English.

Try this in your next lesson; when the last student arrives to class, lead the other students into a sudden, unexpected, rousing rendition of "Happy Birthday to You . . . !" This will create for the last, and very surprised student a strong and urgent need to say, "It's not my birthday!" Or the next time you sanitize your students' hands at your classroom door, surprise them with only a few drops of sanitizer, before inviting them inside. This situation requires a phrase such as, "It's not enough!" In short, the NTE approach has the teacher create a variety of situations for students that have them *feel a need* to say something.

As you read this, you may be wondering, "How can students use English expressions they don't know yet?" The expression "It's not enough!", or even "It's not my birthday!" may be cases in point. Or you're thinking perhaps, "Shouldn't we teach students English expressions before we provide opportunities to use them?"

In answer to the first question, indeed students cannot use English expressions they don't yet know. In answer to the second question, no. In answer to both of these questions simultaneously, I believe that we should teach unfamiliar English expressions precisely *at the time* that students feel they're in a situation that genuinely requires them to use it. Teachers should simply give students the expression to say, and have them say it. This makes a solid connection between *language and the situation in which to use it*.

Teachers who begin implementing the NTE Approach also occasionally ask "What do we do if students respond in Japanese to the situations we create for them?" If students aren't used to using English in the classroom, then their use of Japanese is inevitable. If the classroom environment encourages English use, then our students' Japanese tells us that they understand the situation they're in, but they don't know or have forgotten the English expression to use. Either way, teachers should give students the expression they need, and have them say it. Students should then be put back into the same situation as soon as possible and be given a chance to use it.

Another common question is "Realistically, how much English can we elicit from our students through situations that we create in the confines of a classroom?" Surprisingly, quite a lot. The following two photos, Figures 1 and 2 (representing two different classes) show all the English that students produced *independently* (i.e., not repeated or drilled) during a regular 100-minute lesson. The expressions were recollected by the students and written on the whiteboard during a post-lesson brainstorm.

Figure 1

In a Class With Children Aged Between Nine and 11 Years Old

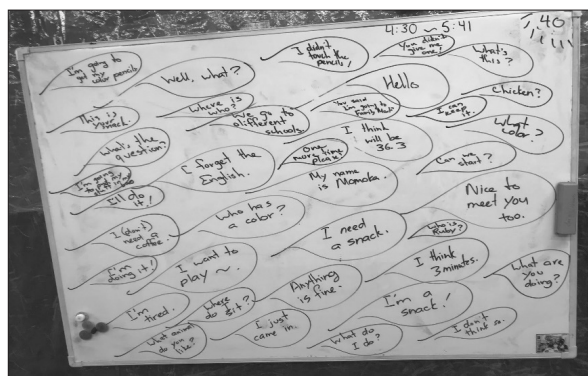
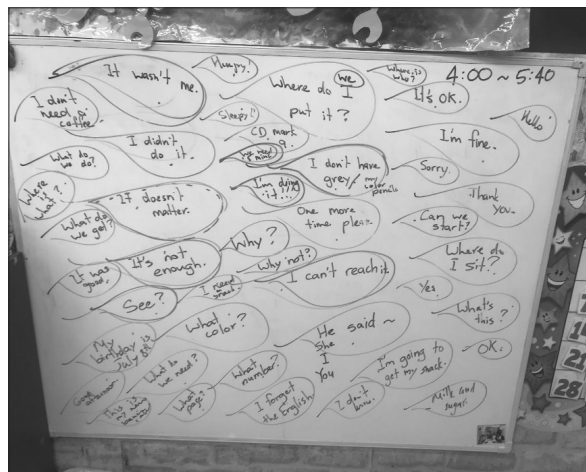


Figure 2

In a Class With Children Aged Between 10 and 12 Years Old



Some of the expressions are surprising, and perhaps not commonly associated with, or heard in, after-school children's English classrooms in this country: "We go to different schools", "You didn't give me one", "Well what?" "I just came in", "I'm going to get my color pencils", "I don't need a coffee", "It's not enough", and, "It doesn't matter."

What these expressions have in common is that they were all produced as a result of students finding themselves in situations that genuinely required this English. Few of these expressions are new in this lesson. In other words, the students have been placed in the same situations before, in previous lessons. After all, it was the situations themselves that introduced students to these expressions in the first place. In today's lesson, the teacher is putting students back into situations they have been in before, and previously learned expressions are reproduced.

Teachers who implement the NTE approach in their classrooms commonly experience a dramatic increase in their students' English output. This is a very exciting development for both teachers and students. If the students already have a positive attitude towards using English, the increase may be immediate. Those students who don't have a particularly positive attitude towards using English often start developing one with the NTE approach.

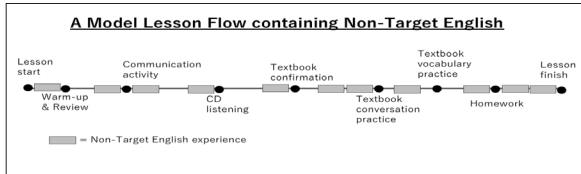
However, teachers should take care not to get carried away. Progress through the textbook, and the practicing of "Target English" should not be abandoned. Students should experience a good balance of both TE and NTE in the classroom. If students can feel success in actually *using* English



(NTE), then they can put the purpose of practicing English (TE) into perspective.

The diagram in Figure 3 shows the balance of TE and NTE experiences in a typical English lesson for children.

**Figure 3**  
A Model Lesson Flow Containing Non-Target English

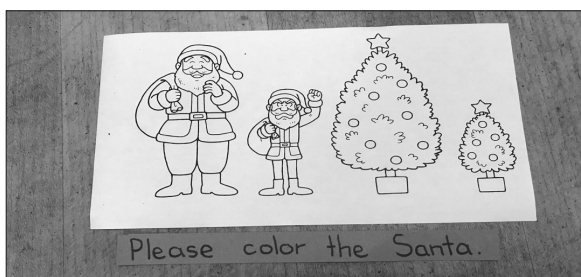


The placement of NTE experiences for students at these times in a lesson is spontaneous because situations that require them to say something can occur naturally. If students don't know what textbook page to turn to at the start of the textbook section, they'll need to use the question "What page?". If the CD begins too loudly at the start of the CD listening section, they'll need to use the expression "Turn it down, please" or something similar.

These situations can be planned in advance, or be taken advantage of spontaneously as they happen. Teachers who crave students to speak out will think quickly on their feet, and can recognize moments when a situation can potentially be created. If a student drops her pencil case accidentally, a quick-thinking teacher may ask her "Hey, why are you angry?!" to immediately create a situation in which she has to deny she's angry: "I'm not angry!" or "I just dropped it!" or "It was an accident!"

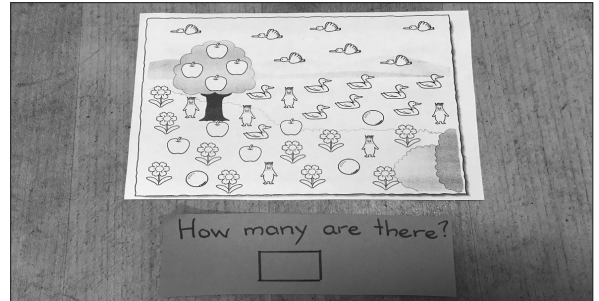
Activities that involve reading and writing can also very easily generate NTE from the students. Consider the following reading task. Students who read the text in Figure 4 will find themselves not knowing which Santa to color! They will need to ask "Which Santa do we color?"

**Figure 4**  
Two Santas, Two Christmas trees. "Learning World 1 Workbook" by Mikiko Nakamoto (1998)



Here is something similar.

**Figure 5**  
Counting and Coloring Worksheet From "Welcome to Learning World Yellow Workbook" by Mikiko Nakamoto (1996)



Students reading this will find themselves not knowing what to count. They will need to use "How many what?" or "What do I need to count?"

Perhaps the most interesting and important aspect of the NTE approach is that after a while, once students begin to feel success with using their English in situations that are created by the teacher, they very often initiate their own output, this time choosing to speak out as opposed to only speaking out when it's needed. Arguably, the NTE approach can positively affect students' motivation to speak out. When individual students start to speak out, this can trigger their classmates' motivation to speak out. In this way, students can learn language and develop good attitudes to speaking not only from the teacher, but also from each other.

Do you see the potential implications of this? If students of English in this country can start using English in the classroom more, through situations that are deliberately created by the teacher (the NTE Approach), and with this process in turn motivating students to speak out on their own, then current Japanese attitudes towards using English, and the ability to do so, can be greatly improved.

Our students live in this century of instant global interaction where the amount and quality of information they can give and receive depends on the ability to communicate freely in English. If children can develop this skill in classrooms today by way of the NTE Approach, they will undoubtedly be better prepared for tomorrow.

## References

Nakamoto, M. (1996). *Welcome to Learning World Yellow Workbook*. Apricot Publishing.