



## Using the MOTHER Model to Enhance Teaching

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Based on the results of class surveys and classroom observation, the author noticed that there was something in her teaching that needed to be improved. The author decided to conduct an action research project guided by Kurt Lewin's model (planning, acting, observing, reflecting), in order to reflect on her teaching and understand the reasons behind the problems exhibited by students. To address these problems, the author developed the MOTHER model (management, overall language learning, teams and tasks, hands-on activities, engagement and encouragement, and relaxation) and applied it to her English classes to create a better learning environment and enhance student motivation.

授業観察及び授業観察に裏打ちされた授業アンケートの結果から、自分の授業には改善すべき点があることに気づいた。Kurt Lewinの実地研究モデル(計画、行動、観察、反省)に導かれた研究企画を実施した。自身の授業を振り返り、学生の授業態度の背後にある理由を抽出し、授業の問題点を解決し、授業の改善を行った。より良い学習環境を作り、生徒のモチベーションを高めるために、筆者独自のMOTHERモデル(management, overall language learning, teams and tasks, hands-on activities, engagement and encouragement and relaxation)を英語の授業に適用した。

**K**urt Lewin, a professor, activist, and researcher, introduced the concept of action research (AR) during the 1940s, and it has since been adopted by practitioners in many different fields. He suggested that when teachers identify problems in their classes, a continuous cycle proceeds following these steps: planning, acting, observing, and reflecting (Amin et al., 2019; Clem, 1993; Lewin, 1946). In this paper the author describes how she brought the AR cycle into her classroom practice by noticing problems with

her classes, reflecting on them, making plans, and taking action to solve the problems the author found. This started with the recognition of inappropriate behavior among her students along with the feeling that something in her practice was not right over the course of teaching university-level English classes from 2019 to 2021. The author saw students doing things such as playing games on their phones during class, talking during her explanations, not submitting assignments on time, sleeping in class, and often being absent. After class, the author was stressed out and depressed, and the author wondered what was wrong with her teaching, how the author could deal with students' disrespectful behavior, and how the author could help her students learn more smoothly. The author decided to take action to change the situation and used the AR model in order to find ways to improve her own teaching and support student learning, especially with the goal of enhancing their motivation. In what follows the author describes this process, starting with her observations and reflections on the problems the author had found, followed by planning solutions and taking action.

### Observation and Reflection on Problems

In 2022, the classes the author taught were online due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The author chose two sections of the same course with a total of 52 2<sup>nd</sup>-year students (24 and 28). They were taking a project-based English class that was a part of the university's general core curriculum and aimed to balance the four language skills. The students developed English skills through various activities, such as group projects, presentations, written reflections, and extensive reading via the XReading platform for homework. Classes were conducted mostly in English, with very little use of Japanese. The data that the author used to reflect on the situation included the results of university classroom surveys conducted with both classes at the end of the first semester of 2022 as well as her own observations and notes. The questionnaires included three categories of questions: students' evaluations of themselves, the teacher, and class materials, with a comment space at the end.



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According to the students, the strong points of her classes were friendliness and a kind personality on her part, enjoyable activities, especially warm-up activities, a sense of enjoyment of English, and her use of group and pair work. The author noted these as strengths of the class to be maintained. On the other hand, questionnaires and observations revealed two types of problems: those related to her teaching and those related to student attitudes and motivation. The questionnaires indicated that students needed more explanation of assignments, especially in Japanese. Some did not understand the grading criteria, though the author had explained them during the course introduction, and some did not understand content explained in English. These comments indicated that the preparation of materials was not adequate, and that at least some items, such as the grading policy, had to be explained more than once.

Moreover, her observations revealed problems with her teaching as well as problematic behaviors among students that the author could not overlook. For example, The author struggled with some aspects of teaching, which kept her classes from proceeding smoothly. These included technical glitches, time management, large numbers of text messages from students who did not understand assignments or had to be absent, as well as the stress of monitoring students' reactions in online classes day after day. At the same time, the author noticed that some students did not follow instructions, were late for class, slept during class, even when the camera was on, did not submit assignments on time, submitted poor quality work, did not do the assigned reading, and a few did not even attend the final test. These actions can be identified as related to students' attitudes and motivation (Eberly Center for Teaching Excellence & Education Innovation, n.d.). Keeping these reflections in mind, including the issues that the author found related to classroom management and student motivation, the author knew what needed to be improved. As a result, in order to deal with the issues of these weak points during the following semester, focusing especially on changes that would support student motivation, the author started planning solutions.

### Planning Solutions and Taking Action

Based on the problems described above, the author designed an original teaching model to be applied in the second semester to resolve the issues. The author calls it the MOTHER model: *management, overall language learning, teams and tasks, hands-on activities, engagement and encouragement, and relaxation*. This model aims to keep the strengths of her approach (overall language learning, teamwork on tasks/projects, and the relaxing atmosphere of the class) and improve particular areas such as classroom management and support for student motivation. The six main ideas are described below in turn.

### Management

Unlike the first semester, from the first class of the second semester, her students and the author discussed rules and consequences in order to help them understand the class regulations and support smooth classroom management (Kerdikoshvili, 2012). Also, besides talking about classroom expectations, the author incorporated course goals and advantages of learning a language into their discussions from day one as well. Time management was supported by using an online timer or countdown timer depending on the task to keep students on task. This helped both the students and the author manage time. Furthermore, class content was prepared in advance and uploaded to the Moodle learning management system (LMS) for students to review and follow-up on when absent and when they forgot assignment deadlines. The author typed up all content covered in each class, including assignments and homework, in short and simple points for students to review. In addition, students were given information about their grade in the course at the beginning, middle, and just before the end of the semester.

### Overall Language Learning

Fortunately, the English program at the university where the author works is a unified, project-based curriculum, and some shared resources are available online to help teachers support student learning. The author took advantage of these resources to develop a more integrated approach, as researchers have suggested that integrated skills teaching models can help develop learners' fluency, accuracy, and socio-cultural communicative competence, while the learning of language skills can aid the learning of other skills (Brown, 2001; Hinkel, 2010). In order to support language learning in all four skills, mainly at the beginning of the class, students were able to talk in pairs on various topics related to class content, work individually on tasks using listening, reading, and writing skills, and integrate all four skills while working in teams and on presentations. Reading was assigned for homework along with some listening and writing practice.

### Teams and Tasks

Teamwork was the key to completing the projects from the textbook chosen by the university (Benevides & Valvona, 2018). In each class, students were able to meet and discuss with teammates in order to complete team assignments, which were part of their projects. In addition, after forming teams around the middle of the semester, the author had students do team-building activities such as creating a team name, team logo, team motto, and participate in question-and-answer sessions with ice breaking questions

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and guessing games about teammates' interesting personal information. The tasks of each class were allocated using the textbook and online platforms such as Google Docs, Jamboard, Google Forms, and YouTube. When the time came for team presentations at the end of the semester, instead of choosing the team order randomly as in the first semester, the author used a random order wheel, to which students responded positively. This idea worked as a transition between group presentations that maintained the flow of the class and kept students engaged.

### Hands-On Activities

Besides the use of a textbook and activities provided by the university, the author added a variety of media for more interactive learning. As the classes were conducted online, the author provided online material for students when they worked in breakout rooms, which the author was able to monitor through platforms such as Jamboard (for giving feedback and brainstorming), Google Forms (for voting, checking understanding, taking quizzes, following up on group work, and self-evaluating after each stage), Google Slides (for making team presentation slides), and Google Docs (for adding team information and scheduling presentations), all of which allowed students to actively use language online. In addition, as the university provided the XReading platform for students to do extensive reading online, students were able to read books at their own pace outside the classroom as homework.

### Encouragement and Engagement

In the first semester, the author lectured when giving a general course introduction to grading policies and overall tasks in the first class, and mainly focused on teaching according to the textbook afterward. In the second semester, the author encouraged students to see the value of the course from day one, engaged everyone by using jigsaw techniques to remind them that they were important and had a role in their team, and wrote feedback and encouraging messages on their submissions. The author checked class attendance as well and spent that time saying something to each student to establish connections and to show that each student was important to her. Through the Jamboard platform, students wrote encouraging messages and constructive comments on presentations by different teams. Students were able to give positive and constructive feedback such as, "the design of the slides was good," "slides are so cool, nice presentation," and "it was easy to read because the text was in different colors." Also, they were able to share their favorite books from the XReading program using the sticky note

function. During this activity, the author noticed many students smiling and moving their faces close to the screen to read the sticky notes on their screens.

### Relaxation

Earlier in the 2022 academic year, her class was conducted by using the textbook and materials provided by the program with some extra activities as games. In the second semester, the author added more activities to spice up the classroom. The author also started adapting a suggestopedia approach by playing classical music and setting her onscreen background with plants, flowers, and natural light, unlike the first semester, where the author had only used a plain brown background. Moreover, the author employed games and warm-up activities to start each class. Relaxing class activities included seasonal parties and activities where students chose topics related to their interests and social trends for pair discussion. Based on class small talk, the author learned that many of the female students were fans of the South Korean girl group Blackpink, so the author used a video of Blackpink giving a speech on the global fight against climate change for students to watch and discuss. Also, during the 2022 World Cup, the author showed the opening ceremony performance of the song "Dreamers" by Jungkook from BTS, another Korean pop star, who collaborated with the Qatari singer, Fahad Al Kubaisi. The video included subtitles, and students then discussed topics in breakout rooms such as soccer, BTS, cross-cultural music, and the FIFA World Cup.

### Outcomes

After applying the MOTHER model for a semester, the class went more smoothly than before, mainly because the author had prepared beforehand and had less worry about teaching compared to the previous semesters. Students also gave more positive feedback on questionnaires than the previous semester. None of them complained about explanations in English or about the grading.

Regarding student motivation and attitudes, the author noticed that some students were the same, while others changed their in-class behavior. For example, in the first semester, some students looked bored during class, submitted assignments late, did not know about assignments or deadlines and submitted poor quality work. Some were always late for class, never did assigned reading, and were absent for the final test. In the second semester after applying the MOTHER model, the author engaged with all students in each class, checked their understanding, and uploaded content, assignments, and homework for each class in English on the LMS. They also were able to choose topics

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they liked for discussion. The author gave encouragement and praised some students who displayed low motivation when they took charge as team leaders. Her observations via the online medium indicated that some students who had looked bored in the previous semester appeared more engaged and receptive. One student who had always submitted assignments late started to do so on time, and another who had never done the assigned reading started reading for the first time.

### Conclusion

All in all, after conducting an action research project for two semesters, it can be said that the MOTHER model helped her teaching in terms of preparation and classroom management. The author was able to prepare the lesson in advance according to the students' needs, design and plan more appropriate language learning activities, and feel less worried about her own teaching. Students were able to review and check the assignments on their own using the LMS without having to contact her. Also, the model helped in creating a positive language learning environment, with classes that were more relaxed and supportive, where students were able to work with the language individually, in pairs, and in teams, and support was provided for students who participated passively.

There were some points that should be taken into consideration. As this study was conducted in an online setting, the reactions of all students were not always visible, as some of them did not turn on their cameras. Consequently, the breakout room activities could not be always monitored. However, the author is still in the process of observing in her everyday teaching after returning to a face-to-face setting. The author hopes this action research project encourages sharing about the problems teachers find while teaching Japanese students in a higher education setting. The author also sincerely hopes that this small project can be useful for other teachers who are facing their own unique and challenging issues.

### Bio Data

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