

Centre for English Language Studies

Postgraduate programmes, Open Distance Learning

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Student ID number	1068235
Module Number (1-6)	1
Title of Degree Programme:	TEFL
Title of Module:	Language Teaching and Classroom Research Methods
Assessment Task No.	LT/09/05
First submission or Resubmission	First submission
Date Submitted	January 27, 2010
Name of tutor	Paul Moritoshi

The Importance of Speech and other Techniques that Work**By: Staci-Anne Ali****January 27, 2010**

Section 1: The introduction

Communicating effectively is essential to how we live our lives. Whether it is through speech, gestures, or writing, it is universal regardless of the language we speak. We use gestures, body language, and facial expressions to communicate how we feel, think and get what we want. No matter where we go or what we do communication is a never ending process from birth to death. Communication is used to help us get what we want. As babies grow they learn to speak in order to get their needs fulfilled. They learn to use the tools they have such as: sounds, gestures, and “facial expressions to convey meaning” (Savignon 1997). As we learn, vocabulary increases, we become more effective at communicating clearly and personal opinions and preferences are formed allowing us to develop as individuals. Learning to communicate is essential. For Second Language learners, communicating effectively requires knowledge of various techniques in order to communicate. Conversations are like a tennis match. There needs to be a “certain amount of reciprocation from the other person verbally as well as using other methods in an exchange of ideas and opinions and personal beliefs” (Brown, 1987, p. 206). In this paper my focus will be on speaking and using a humanistic approach to learning which considers the feelings and thoughts of the student and how it can help the overall learner, examining techniques used and what can be used to help stimulate this. I will outline the techniques based on the literature that have been or are currently being used, as well as examining other techniques or methods that might be suitable to help facilitate speech in the class. Section 1 will introduce the purpose of this paper, followed by Section 2 which will outline the program I lead, and the structure of the class, Section 3 will illustrate what techniques are being used, considering their good and bad points, Section 4 will show what techniques might be suitable and how they can help the learner, taking into account the good and bad points. Section 5 will conclude this paper re-iterating the important points of speech.

Section 2: Power Up! Tutorial

I teach in a program called the “Power Up Tutorial (PUT) which is an innovative program at Nagoya University of Foreign Studies (NUFS) introduced in April of 2003” (Kindt, 2004,). These classes consist of 3 classrooms with 5 tables in each class suited for 3-4 students at each table. The room is equipped with audio visual equipment such as; an entertainment system with a plasma TV, CD player and a white board. “The classroom size allows for tutoring at individual tables ensuring minimal distraction from neighbouring tables” (Kindt 2004), it also allows the students to move to different tables and converse with other partners and teachers with ease.

The purpose of the PUT program is to increase the student’s ability to;

1. Communicate orally
2. Have strategic competence
3. Engage actively
4. Have confidence
5. Increase learner autonomy

In each class there is one designated class leader (CL). He or she is “responsible for the class structure, presentation of material, and topics” (Kindt 2002); and also to answer the students’ questions, clarify homework questions, and conduct guided conversations. The CL should oversee the running of the class and ensure that the students get optimum speaking time. There are 3-4 students sitting at each table. The native English teacher’s responsibility is to engage the student in topic related conversation, and to “present some of the material and facilitate conversations” (Kindt 2004). The lessons are taught from the course books “Tools for Increasing Proficiency in Speaking” written by Kindt and Barnard. The books used are 1 and 2 that increase in difficulty as the semester progresses. Book one is beginner to intermediate level which covers topics such as: Lifestyles, Hobbies and My family. Book Two increases in difficulty with themes such as; Local Culture, Things That Really Bug Me, and What Do You

Think. There are selected topics with conversation strategies such as: clarification, using follow-up questions, and asking for more information. The students must try to use the conversation strategies with the selected topic. The required text is complete with vocabulary, native English speakers' conversations, student conversations, conversation strategies, and helpful hints which serve the purpose of instructing the student on how to make the conversation card (Appendix 1); and specific phrases that should be used. Example conversation cards are also included as guidelines of how to make the card. The final page consists of questions that might be useful for the student to use during the conversation. Students are also encouraged to think of some of their own questions. This course book is closely related to "Nice talking with you" by Kenny and Woo, which students also use in another oral communication class (OCS).

Each week students make a conversation card (Appendix 2) based on a topic in the text or assigned by the CL (Kindt 2004). A conversation card is a B6 (128mm X 182mm) index card that is to be completed for homework. Based on the topic, the students are instructed to write their main ideas on the topic and use them as a guide during their in-class conversations. They are encouraged to use simple words and phrases to jog the memory and imitate a natural conversation. The students talk about the topic first with support from their cards and then the Native teacher at their table. During the course of the semester, the students are weaned off the text book and eventually the card, thus promoting a more natural free flowing conversation. In each class the aim is for at least three 15 minute conversations at first. The structure is:

10 minutes for the warm-up activities,

15 minutes for teachers to correct the conversation cards, review the useful questions and conversation strategies

3 X 15 minutes (45 minutes) conversations

10 minutes for homework.

After the last conversation the teachers are allotted 2-5 minutes to grade the students based on the fluency of their conversation. The remaining time is used for student`s to switch tables, and for teacher`s to give pointers for the next conversation.

The change from 15 to 20 minute conversations should be a gradual change. The Native speaker is encouraged whenever possible to allow the students to speak because the class focus is on oral communication, and the aim is to carry on a fluid conversation from start to finish using conversation strategies taught in the class. Throughout the semester, the students are encouraged to examine their language skills every 4 weeks by taking part in recordings. "Recordings give the student the opportunity to hear their own language production, recognize common errors and make improvements themselves" (Kindt 2004). Students record a conversation with a classmate using the Olympus voice-tek V13 (Appendix 3) on the topic of the day.

The transcription (Appendix 4) is a word for word written record of the recorded conversation (Kindt 2003; Lynch, 2001). Students are then asked to examine the transcript for corrections in grammar and sentence order; as well as make improvements in the conversation based on what they should have done as opposed to what they actually did. They are also encouraged to include non-verbal gestures that can't be seen during the recording. Students should identify conversation strategies they used during the recording. There are questions on the back of the transcript sheet which students are to answer; it is also a good method for teachers to view the students' weak and strong points, their opinions and their experience in the program so we can collectively help them improve (Appendix 5). We are always looking to improve the program as well as the text. The opinions of students are important. If the chapter section is too difficult or too easy, adjustments and improvements can be made.

Section 3: Techniques Currently Used

3.1 The Humanistic Approach

In the PUT classes we currently use a number of techniques to help facilitate the increase of speech. The humanistic approach is defined as numerous techniques that consider the whole person (Candlin 2001 pg. 152). It considers the learner's feelings, thoughts and current knowledge about what he or she is learning in the target language (Richards and Rogers 2001 pg. 90). Using this approach considers all aspects of the individual and what can help stimulate each of their senses taking into consideration how they feel and their thoughts and also by allowing them to express themselves in the target language, like language immersion.

3.2 Silence is Golden!

Silence is key during the conversations in regular PUT classes to maximize student talking time. This allows the student to build up a flow and confidence, as well as forcing them to draw upon the skills they have learned to prolong the conversation in a structured manner. The teacher should ideally talk for 30% of the time, leaving 70% for students. Classes are ninety minutes; teacher talking time is aimed at 20-25 minutes on average 22-20%. By keeping within these time constraints, the students talking time is maximized. We have adapted the "silent way" and are working towards it as a goal that teachers can use to intervene and make the suggested correction and then allow the conversation to continue. The native speaker uses the technique of silence to monitor student errors, grammatical structures and to suggest mindfully other options as well as appropriate corrections (Brown 1987 pg. 207). This can be used during the transcription activities as well as daily conversations. Silence can help in these situations, however, it may sometimes appear as if the teacher is not interested in the conversation and isn't listening to what the student has to say.

3.2 The Use of Music

Suggestopedia is used in the PUT classes to create an ambiance. It is a well known humanistic method that was developed by Georgi Lozanov (Richards and Rodgers 2001 pg. 100). We make use of music to create a non-threatening environment, which helps to stimulate a mental state that facilitates learning. The target is conversational proficiency in the language

being studied (Candlin 2001 pg. 154); this is perfect for PUT since it is a conversational class. According to Candlin (2001), using suggestopedia, “is 25 times more effective, and improves conversational proficiency than other methods” although it is not explained what methods they are compared to (p. 152). It takes the attention off the students and makes for a more relaxed environment in which the student can learn with ease. In the PUT classes the students are encouraged to have guided conversations at the tables for 15 to 20 minutes. When the volume of the music increases the students end the conversation naturally using the conversation strategies; move to a new table with a new teacher and talk to a new set of students. This program was the first ever to use this method. It helps the students relax and it helps them produce natural speech. Lozanov supports that “suggestopedia directs learners to acts of communication” (Candlin 2001 pg. 154). One possible down side to using this method is that it can be distracting to students who are paying more attention to the music than the actual conversation. The type of music can help or hinder the absorption of information (Candlin 2001 pg. 154). Candlin points out that creating the right kind of environment is essential for learning to occur. The results of a small survey show that Japanese students agrees that using music in class was good because they didn’t feel embarrassed when talking and they felt that no one could hear them.

3.3 The Benefit of Working in Pairs

Co-operative learning is defined as “small groups working together with usually 2 to 4 members” (Richards and Renandya 2002 pg. 53). PUT classes generally follow a 15-20-20-20-15 minute pattern. During these stages the CL would have an introduction or re-introduction, present the activity, followed by 3 consecutive 15 or 20 minute conversation blocks where the students would work in groups of 3 or sometimes even pairs. The focus is always on the ability of the students to speak as fluently as possible to get their meanings across about a given topic. The topics range from simple, such as, “3 things about me”, to more difficult “What do you think.” By pairing the students in groups and pairs they can have balanced conversations with each other. It is obvious that students talk more openly and freely with the same sex groups.

Students call it “Girl Talk” and “Boys Talk”. In the presence of mixed company students become more reserved and aware of each other, and as a result limiting the progress of the conversation. For example, conversation 1 is between a female teacher, one male student and two female students. Note the structure.

Conversation 1

Teacher: Hi, what’s new?

Boy 1: I had my part-time job this weekend.

Girl 2: Oh really?

Girl 3: Where do you work?

1: I work at café.

2: Oh, busy?

1: Very busy, Do you have the part-time job?

3. That’s too bad.

2: Yes, but I retired, so tired, too busy. Money a little.

1: That’s too bad. I’m sorry. Fight! Fight!

2: Do you have part-time job?

Conversation 1 follows a structure, it’s on topic, and there is less willingness to get side tracked. Conversation 2 is between a group of female students and a female teacher. Notice the change in topic content.

Conversation 2

Teacher: Good morning, what’s new?

1. Well, I had a great weekend
2. Really?!
3. Yah, what you doing?
1. (giggling) I had a date.
2. Hmmmm...ooooo
3. With who?
2. Oh, really?
1. A boy at my part-time job
3. What he like?
2. What you do...together?
1. He is kind boy, but I no like his face.
2. You don't like him?!
1. I like him but his face not handsome.
3. What's his name?
1. it's a secret, He's in this class!
3. I know, I know.
2. There are two boys in class.
1. I'm embarrassed.
3. You are red!

During conversation 2, all members were girls. The students revealed more details about feelings, relationships, personal and private information. There is a structure, but unlike the conversation 1, conversation 2 is more open and honest and has a more natural feel to it. Although working in groups is good, if the students are well acquainted, they might talk too much in their mother tongue, about other topics and may be distracted easily.

3.4 Memorized Phrases

Formulaic language is something that students use to help them remember, it acts like a mnemonic device (Richards and Renandys 2002 pg.271). One phrase in the Japanese system is;

Q. Hello, How are you?

A. I'm fine thank you, and you?

Memorized lexical phrases are said to increase the speakers' fluency and speed. During the introduction of class or the warm-up, almost all students respond with the aforementioned memorized phrase. The second most popular phrase is;

Q. Hello, How are you?

A. I'm sleepy.

Richards and Renandys (2002) illustrate that learning new vocabulary and phrases are important in the continuation of the student's progress and improvement. When a student is still using very basic phrases to articulate themselves their learning curve probably hasn't improved. Candlin (2001) calls this fossilization, "when the learner seems to cease to make any visible progress, no matter how many language classes they attend or how actively they continue to use their second language for communicative purposes...they freeze or become stuck at some more or less deviant stage" (pg.20). In class when the following phrases are used:

Q. Hey! How's it going? Q. What's new? Q. How are you guys? Q.
What's going on?

The students don't know the meaning of this and try to look it up in the dictionary. It is not clear if they understand that the question is asking, "Hi, How are you?" due to the memorization of lexical phrases.

3.5 Recognizing Errors and the Transcript

Recognizing errors allows the student to understand, for themselves, what error was made and where it needs to be placed in the sentence as well as how to correct it (Richards and Renandya 2002 pg. 330). This has proven to be effective because students are able to recognize minimal errors such as; the use of prepositions, verb tenses in the past, present, and future; singular and plurals; adjectives and expressions and phrases in activities like the transcript. During these conversations they can confidently express their knowledge on the topic, and make use of vocabulary used in that chapter that relate to the chosen topic (Appendix 4). The student can also incorporate the things learned in class such as the various conversation strategies for example; asking for advice, offering advice, responding to advice, clarifying, describing and offering cultural explanations into their work. Transcripts are good for students because they allow students to understand some of the corrections and mistakes for themselves. The students agree that hearing themselves talk allows them to understand their weak points. Consequently, it involves too much writing, doesn't ensure that the grammar is fully understood, doesn't completely mimic real life situations, it is time consuming and the allotted time is not always adequate for each student.

Section 4: Things to Consider Using

Based on a review of literature for this module, the techniques mentioned in this section are possibilities that might be useful to the students overall progress. These techniques might actually help them to increase their language accuracy because it considers different aspects such as; the thoughts and feelings of the humanistic learner. Both the positive and negative aspects of using these techniques are considered.

4.1 Speeches

To recognize errors, students should consider making speeches. This can encourage peer evaluation; increase the student's ability for public speaking and might help less confident students build their self-esteem in a supportive environment. Speeches are more practical than transcripts for their development. This might be problematic considering the basis of this program is geared towards conversations, and the re-structuring of the class content for this might not be feasible. However, over a span of 2 days it is possible if the class is divided into two groups, A and B; A presents their speeches, while B continues with the conversation topics. While the CL, and 1 ALT and two students can evaluate the speeches. Each speech could total three minutes allowing each student enough time to participate in the conversations.

4.2 Peer Influence

As suggested by Richards and Renandys (2002) (pp. 228-229), peer evaluation has been said to be an effective technique. This will be a useful addition to the program because students are more apt to listen to the advice of their friends than others. If students can relate to each other's mistakes then it might be easier to improve themselves. In the PUT program, the teachers can monitor the peer evaluation system and set some guidelines and rules. For example; be mindful of criticism and improvements. Did the student use conversation strategies? Did the student use follow-up questions and if so, how many? (See Appendix 6). Using the sample from appendix 6, the students can be observed and receive appropriate feedback. This technique can also be used for the transcriptions because it can give the student some insight from others on what they can improve. Also, if the students can contribute to the

class, it might give them more incentive to try harder, like internal motivation, which takes into consideration the humanistic approach and the learner as a whole.

4.3 Journals

For some students speaking may not be their strong point. For the Humanistic learner, keeping a reflective journal takes into consideration the student's ability to think in the target language. It is also useful to log progress over time to show overall improvement throughout the course of the semester (Richards and Renandys 2002 pg. 230). A journal might work best for some of the students who have more introverted personalities. It can help them to express themselves in ways they feel comfortable. It is unknown if it is suitable especially for the amount of students in each class, and the time required to mark each journal. Also, this class is based on oral communication, so the purpose is not to write, but to learn how to speak. This technique would be recommended for students when practicing on their own and for personal improvement.

4.4 On the Creative Side

Role-play situations where the students are able to take on different roles are an excellent way to help students develop their skills (Richards and Renandys 2002 pg. 163). It is fun as well as an exciting evaluation tool in which students are in complete control of increasing their independent learning, as well as encouraging learner autonomy. It creates motivation for the individual thoughts of the student. In the university annual Summer English Camp, part of the curriculum is a small skit. The students have to create a skit based on characters they draw from a hat or box. Working, in groups, they have to decide the details of the skit. The non-performing students will then vote for the best skit, evaluate them based on the sample in appendix 6. Consequences of this are that it is time consuming, the students might use their mother tongue to communicate their thoughts and ideas and introverted learners might have difficulty.

4.5 Video vs. Audio?

We already do audio recordings however from the second year video recordings begin. It's the notion of advancing gradually and progressing to second year. The students can look forward to something. We use big screen computers with built-in video cams making it easy to transfer the file to memory sticks. Richards and Renandys (2002 pg. 209) agree that the video gives the best possible feedback because it provides a simultaneous display of contributions, sociolinguistic strategies, group dynamics, language use and accuracy. Video recordings allow more information to be available. "Non-verbal communication is so subtle and subconscious in a native speaker that verbal language seems, by comparison, quite mechanical and systemic. Language becomes distinctly human through its non-verbal dimension, or what Hall (1966) calls the "hidden dimension" (Brown 1987 pg. 209). Starting the video recordings earlier might be more effective than just having it in the second year. There are 4 recordings in the PUT program; I suggest that the last recording be done as a video. It would be beneficial for the students to understand how it works and it would be good preparation for second year.

4.6 Vocabulary

Vocabulary is a core component of language proficiency and provides much of the basis for how well learners speak, listen, read and write. Without extensive vocabulary and strategies for acquiring new vocabulary, learners often achieve less than their potential and may be discouraged from making use of language learning opportunities around them such as listening to the radio, listening to native speakers, using the language in different contexts, reading or watching TV (Richards and Renandys 2002 pg. 255). In this program, there are many techniques that have been suggested to try and help students learn vocabulary. Vocabulary quizzes were useful at one point but students usually arrived late to avoid it. It was met with some opposition from others. Exercises that proved to be successful were: fill in the blanks with the vocabulary list at the bottom (appendix 7), fill in the blanks with song lyrics (appendix 8), and the crazy story. The crazy story is a story that the students create based on what vocabulary they know. The left section of the page is numbered from 1 to 8 and as a group

students have to agree on the answers and fill in the numbers. The story is then read aloud and the most creative story wins.

The Crazy Story

1. Name of a person in the class

And

2. The name of a famous person

Went to

3. A place

By

4. Name of transportation/ vehicle

So they could

5. Adverb

6. Verb

7. Adjective

8. Noun

4.7 Things That Work

Watching a short movie clip such as “SpongeBob Square Pants” and fill in the blanks with vocabulary as well as conversation strategies has proven to be effective. My co-worker Joseph Wood, who recently presented at the JALT conference in 2009, sometimes uses this

technique in his classes. They are successful for a number of reasons; the students are able to see the non-verbal gestures, see how the conversation strategies work in near real life situations, hear other native speakers at a natural pace, understand cultural humour, and understand the content as well as it being entertaining. It is useful because it engages the student and stimulates the visual audio learner. Audio allows the students to listen to natural English, consequently it needs to be repeated and in real life situations you only get one chance. These types of activities, including the crazy story, are time consuming, they detract from the conversations, and the students use their mother tongue to communicate with each other if they don't understand something.

Section 5: Conclusion

Before starting this module it was unclear how the techniques we use affected the student's ability to speak better. I understand now that using a variety of techniques can increase the efficiency of speech communication and consider the humanistic learner. As stated in this paper, the techniques that are currently being used in the PUT program are; silence, music, working in pairs or groups, adjusting the speed of speech, using memorized phrases, and recognizing errors. These techniques help to increase the level of speech in second language learners. However, it doesn't consider all aspects of how the student learns known as the humanistic approach. Based on the literature explored in this module, it is evident that there are various other techniques that engage the student as a whole person, embracing their individualistic thoughts, and emotions in the target language. In order to ensure optimum student success I propose that other techniques such as; speeches, peer influence, journals and role-plays could be implemented into the program to benefit the whole student.