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# Using Students' Written Feedback as Classroom Content to Promote Community

Nora McKenna

*School for International Training*

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USING STUDENTS' WRITTEN FEEDBACK  
AS CLASSROOM CONTENT  
TO PROMOTE COMMUNITY

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE  
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE MASTER OF ARTS IN TEACHING  
DEGREE AT THE SCHOOL FOR INTERNATIONAL TRAINING  
BRATTLEBORO, VERMONT

BY

NORA MCKENNA

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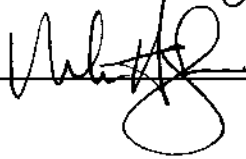
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MAT Program Associate signed on behalf  
of Nora McKenna. 12/1/04

This project by Nora McKenna is accepted in its present form.

Date November 1, 2004

Project Advisor Kathleen Graves

Project Reader 

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## ABSTRACT

This paper describes the collection of written feedback from students and an attempt to impact class atmosphere by publishing back anonymous excerpts to students. By using these excerpts as content for language learning activities, students could enjoy themselves as they warmed up for their weekly lesson in English and at the same time learn about their classmates' perceptions of previous shared learning experiences. This created a type of ongoing written dialogue (correspondence) to articulate the joys and frustrations of learning another language. Meanwhile, students were also learning to trust the feedback cycle and one another as they became aware of the level of support their classmates were offering. In addition to the rationale and background, sample activities are included.

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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### Overview of the Paper

In this paper I will describe work I did using students' written feedback. In this introduction, I will explain why I chose to write about feedback, define what I mean by feedback, discuss the context in which the work with feedback took place, and detail my own learning experience as relates to my Independent Professional Project. In the second chapter I will explain my reasons for soliciting students' written feedback, and specifically how student feedback can help the teacher in her work, how giving feedback can help the students in their work, why I opted to solicit written rather than oral feedback, and why I chose to publish the students' feedback back to them. In the third chapter I will describe activities I designed in order to get the students to notice the publishing of their feedback, while simultaneously building trust in the structured feedback cycle. In the fourth I'll describe the use of activities designed to expand students interaction with the published feedback and enhance the sense of community in our class. In my conclusion I will summarize what I feel I have gained through completing the work for this Independent Professional Project.

### Why I Became Interested in this Topic

The reason I chose this topic was because I found that working with students' written feedback comments made my work as their teacher more rewarding. Once I started soliciting feedback from my students in the form of written comments, what they

wrote shed light on so much that had long been a frustrating mystery, namely silence in discussion classes. I felt I'd struck gold, this 'underground' mode of communication with my students about their learning experience. I wanted to mine it for all it was worth, and I wanted to find a way to share the riches with them. The resulting feedback cycle helped bring about desirable changes in classroom atmosphere, which in turn facilitated helpful learning behavior changes. After several years of looking for ways to get my Japanese students to actively participate in speaking activities, I finally felt I'd found a way to convince them to take the necessary risks and even articulate the benefits of this themselves.

Sharing their own words and ideas with them through publishing proved to be challenging but very worthwhile, giving me plenty of material as well as the enthusiasm to report on our work together and its results in this paper.

### What I Mean by Structured Feedback

In the context of learning, feedback refers to information teachers give to students, or vice-versa, regarding the learning process. Teachers can provide useful feedback for their students, for example, in the form of a correction. Likewise, students can convey helpful information to their teachers. Although in education, feedback is generally understood as the former type, feedback from teacher to students, in this paper, feedback refers to the latter type, the student to teacher type.

Graves and Freeman have made a further distinction between ongoing feedback and structured feedback (Broderick 1981). Ongoing feedback is the 'in the moment' sort, the students' spontaneous responses to the learning experience that communicates to the



teacher something about how the lesson is going for them. For example, facial expressions, questions for clarification, signs of engagement or disengagement from the lesson all serve to inform the teacher as she conducts the lesson. Structured feedback, on the other hand, is consciously elicited by the teacher at a fixed point: physically (thumbs up or down to indicate comprehension, etc.), orally or in writing. It is with this last type that this paper is primarily concerned.

I used structured written feedback from the students to focus on aspects of the learning that I was interested in working on. In this case, the area I hoped to impact by working with students' structured written feedback was class affect. I aimed to shift attitudes and awarenesses about the class as a group of learners and members of a learning community in order to build that community. To that purpose, I published students' feedback comments back to the class.

### My Personal Learning Journey

When I began working with the feedback that would become the focus of this Independent Professional Project, I was teaching English as Foreign Language at a private university in Japan. My students were mostly English majors between 18 and 21 years old. As a native speaker, I was assigned to teach largely Discussion & Debate, Speech & Discussion, Oral English type of classes. Getting students to participate in activities that involved speaking in English could be very frustrating because it was both the main point of my job and my greatest challenge. Many Japanese will tell you they are shy, or that the Japanese are shy. Add to this a heavy emphasis on perfectionism and mastery in education and the fact that many have studied English reading, writing and

grammar but have had little opportunity if any to practice listening and speaking skills. All this meant that my students were very reluctant to participate in the discussions and debates that were part of our assigned work together, which necessarily entailed making mistakes in front of other people.

Therefore, I tried to work on lowering their affective filter (Krashen 1983) and raising their level of security by having them work in pairs or small groups and doing lots of game-like activities with a low emphasis on accuracy. This often worked to get us warmed up, but when I gave them a topic to discuss, the room was suddenly a lot quieter. Giving opinions, explaining ideas, natural turn taking and the like were a good deal more demanding. We needed much more support in order to transition into anything like a discussion or debate, but it took me a while to sort out how to offer that support.

In order to work out determine what kind of support was needed and begin working on how to offer it, I started soliciting written feedback from students, particularly in my 'Speech and Discussion and 'Discussion and Debate' classes. Initially there was not much of a science to it; that is, I didn't have a set system of what kinds of questions I would ask nor how often I would ask for feedback. At first I was asking them to write what they liked or didn't like about the lesson or a particular activity. I would pose questions which I hoped would steer their answers and thinking in a particular direction, such as, "How can preparing mind maps help us with our discussions?" After my studies at the School for International Training, I started asking questions like, "What did you learn today?" and "How did it feel?" Eventually I was asking the students to set their own participation goals for each class meeting and then report on how it went, using phrasing more along the lines of, "What worked? What didn't work?"

Japanese are very traditional in their classrooms; the teacher is viewed as a master, and even asking questions can be seen as disrespectful. The students are not normally invited to evaluate the effectiveness of teaching and learning methods. Not surprisingly, my students mostly wrote lots of nice and encouraging things about our class and were loathe to criticize. More and more, however, students were expressing a desire to participate actively, regretting that they hadn't and ending with that old refrain, "Japanese are shy. I'm shy."

I kept getting the message that the heart was willing, but the flesh was weak. I felt there was only so much I could do in terms of setting discussion tasks if the students themselves had to make the discussions a success, and I wanted them to take some of the responsibility for working towards our goals. Gradually I learned to ask not only how much they got out of a given lesson, but also how they rated their own efforts.

I realized that when they reflected on their own role in a lesson, they were gaining a useful awareness that could potentially serve them in future learning. The feedback habit went from being anonymous comments they wrote on slips of paper, which I had no way to return to them, to student reflection logs that served as a reminder of their efforts and a measure of their progress.

I was so interested in the different things they had written; the variety and depth revealed a whole range of responses that I hadn't had much hint of in my previous five years working in Japan. Students had not given the kind of ongoing feedback that I was used to from my experiences with students in France and the US, where most students aren't as shy about letting the teacher know when they don't understand or what they think of an activity or lesson. Either my Japanese students were intentionally withholding

this out of respect for the teacher, the class, the school system, etc. and/or they were sending subtle messages, which I was unable to decode. In any case, I felt I suffered from a lack of feedback. I expected that they might be much the same only more so in writing: laconic, seemingly ambivalent or maybe even indifferent. When I solicited anonymous written feedback, I got more than I had expected and hoped for. Not only did many say that they enjoyed the class, they went on to say they wanted to improve and talked of doing better next time.

I felt that the affect reflected in the written feedback was more positive than my perception of the atmosphere of the class had led me to believe. The students seemed to be saying that they enjoyed their discussions for the most part, they wanted to improve, and they were willing to take the risks needed to practice those challenging language skills. I was very encouraged to read this because it had not been at all clear to me that this was how they felt. Actually, I found that the class seemed to get in this risk-taking mood towards the end of the class period, right before they wrote their reflection. Then at our next meeting, we'd be right back to being a quiet and hesitant group, approaching warm up activities as awkwardly as ever. In fairness to them, we only met once a week for ninety minutes and the rest of their classes were given in Japanese, so I had to take into account all the things that had come in between the last time they were taking risks in English. I wanted a way to say, "Remember where we left off. Remember how you were last time we met, and let's take today's activities from there."

That's why I decided to try something I'd experienced as a student in Deborah Wiesenthal's Approaches class in the Master's of Arts in Teaching program at SIT in 1998. She had selected excerpts from our response papers and published them for the

whole class to get an idea of the responses of the other students to a given approach we'd studied and experienced. In addition to seeing where the other members of the class weighed in on the content of our class, I was always curious to see what she would choose to include from my paper; there was some epistolary delight in this kind of communication with the teacher. I felt that she had not only read my paper, but by selecting something from it, she had understood me or something of what I was trying to say. This increased my own level of engagement in her class

Back in the teacher role in Japan, I was eager to share what I'd read in my students' feedback with the class as a whole because I thought that by the 'flat' feeling in class, students might not guess that their neighbor enjoyed an activity, learned from it or felt frustrated by not learning from it. In other words, I hadn't been able to guess, so I thought students might not either. By sharing what I was learning from their written feedback, I hoped to reveal the students' engagement to the class as a whole, and somehow counteract the effect of a week of life in Japanese since our last lesson.

In the following chapters I will discuss in detail why I chose to work with the feedback as I did as well as how I used the feedback excerpts in warm-up activities.

## CHAPTER 2

### RATIONALE FOR USING EXCERPTS FROM STUDENTS' WRITTEN FEEDBACK IN CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

#### How Structured Feedback Helps the Teacher

There is much to be learned about what is happening 'inside and between' students (Stevick 1980). If the teacher wants to know how the learning experience is going for her students, she needs to ask them. One of the benefits for teachers obtaining structured feedback is that it opens the channels of communication about what the students are learning. Using student feedback, teachers can assess where students are in the learning process, what they got from a given activity, class period or unit, whether or not students are experiencing access and success, where students are cognitively and affectively, and whether their attitude is supporting their learning or somehow undermining the skills and knowledge the students already possess.

In my Discussion and Debate classes for sophomore and junior English majors, for example, students wrote comments on the content of their discussions, their relative level of participation, their progress towards goals they'd set, and so on. I'd collect these comments after each class, and I read them with a view to determining more productive and enjoyable ways for the class as a group to improve at discussion and debate.

Once the teacher has more information about how the class is going from the students' perspective, she can begin to make use of this resource for her future class meetings with them. Knowing what students are or are not getting from the language lesson gives her a starting place to improve the effectiveness of her teaching. Structured

feedback gives her a clearer picture of students' needs and expectations, which she can use to make informed decisions regarding lesson planning and classroom management. For example, I learned something from the following student comment and many similar ones from other students: "I couldn't volunteer for the class. I felt a little nervous. Next time I want to be the first to express my opinion." I knew about students' nervousness and hesitation, but I hadn't guessed that they were all the while determining to try jumping in next time. Equipped with that knowledge, I began to look for ways to remind them of their intentions and provide opportunities for them to try taking those risks in structured and measurable ways.

Last but not least, by asking the students to contribute their feedback, teachers can demonstrate interest in and respect for the students' perspectives. This in itself contributes to an atmosphere of caring and trust. Then when adjustments are made in deference to students' needs, when selected suggestions are implemented, when students see that their feedback can lead to helpful changes in the class, group morale gets another boost; it impacts class affect positively and this helps the teacher in her work. I found, for example, that I could report back to them that many students had found a particular activity useful and enjoyable, which was a good selling point and spring board to a similar activity. I could remind them of their stated ambitions right before I asked for participation. By linking my requests for participation to their feedback, I found students made a concerted effort to keep their promises. I really needed this inside information to get the momentum going for socially and affectively demanding activities such as discussions and debates in a foreign language. Using their words to get us going helped me have the confidence I needed to sell such activities.

Structured feedback helps teachers assess how the students are doing both cognitively and affectively in class, and this in itself is a good enough reason to consider soliciting it on a regular basis. Meanwhile, the students are being asked to spend some time helping the teacher in her work, but in doing so, they stand to benefit quite a bit themselves. Therefore, it becomes symbiotic because giving feedback can be instructive, reassuring and motivating for students, too. I found that my students' comments were more and more thoughtful. They grew comfortable telling me when something was too hard or boring, and at the same time, they did well when we shifted a greater focus of their reflection to their own efforts and contributions to the class. Most students' comments reflected an understanding that we were working together on improving their individual English skills as well as the class as whole.

#### How Structured Feedback Helps the Students

The work of the student is to learn, but how is this best done? What helps the student learn? What hinders the students' learning? The teacher wants to know this, but how powerful if the students begin to recognize some of these answers for themselves, individually, as a byproduct of trying to explain it to the teacher. As each student reflects upon his own learning experience, he may realize something useful about himself as a learner, something he can experiment with or apply in his learning whether or not the teacher responds specifically to his feedback. He will get practice in meta-cognitive reflection, thinking about thinking, which can then serve him even in learning situations beyond that class. For example, after explicit instruction and focus on asking for clarification to give students much needed practice with this skill, some students were



doing it with ease. It was awkward at first, but students kept track of their attempts and found they were better and better at it. When writing their feedback, they reported on their struggles and successes, learning how they could stretch by taking these measured risks.

Through reflecting on their learning experiences in order to answer the teacher's questions about a given lesson, students are learning about their learning. This helps them increase awareness of their learning styles and preferences and they can then consider what strategies work for them. They may become conscious and then more conscientious of their learning behavior, perhaps experimenting and making adjustments to help their learning. Just as the teacher can use the information gained through feedback to help her plan future lessons, students can apply what they learn about themselves as learners and make informed decisions about the most effective use of their class practice time. For instance, one student wrote, "I did well warming up. I could think of what was related to today's topic with my partner. I listened carefully and I asked my friend for the answers, but I couldn't speak fluently." This student was reporting success with a warm up activity designed to activate schema; once the student has identified this kind of brainstorming as a useful technique, he may feel more comfortable using it next time and possibly make it one of his own tools for future tasks.

This heightened awareness of one's own learning preferences and subsequent choices brings a further awareness of the role each student plays in his own learning. If they are writing about how an activity worked for them, they will be led to reflect on their own attempts to make it work for them. If students are asked to consider what strategies they use to meet their learning goals, they will have to recognize that they have choices in

the matter and are in charge of when and how much they attempt to engage with the material. If they are invited to experiment with different strategies, they cannot perceive themselves as passive receivers of knowledge. With that responsibility for one's own learning should also come a sense of pride for the quality of learning. For example, one student set 'taking the initiative' as her goal for a particular class session, and then wrote, "I tryed [sic] to starting something myself and I said my opinion often. I asked that I couldn't understand. My strategy was good." I loved reading this kind of comment. It seemed miles away from where we had been a few months prior when the students weren't setting their own goals or monitoring their own progress, and when this kind of communication didn't seem possible.

Furthermore, writing feedback can intensify the quality of the learning for a student. The very act of articulating learning makes it more securely fixed to the framework of schema the student already has. When students write about what they learned, they are relating new knowledge to old. This makes learning more powerful, more meaningful.

Besides the cognitive benefits of articulating one's learning, there is also an affective benefit. Writing about their learning experience is an opportunity to let off affective steam. If something has gone wrong, been frustrating or felt unfair, writing about it can be a great release. It's a way to have the last word when maybe they didn't get to during an activity. Writing about conflict often widens the perspective of the person who puts pen to paper when their view is clouded by negative emotion. Perhaps students change their mind and feel better about what happened, or at least don't carry unexpressed tension away with them.

It feels good to report success, too. Many students proudly write about their accomplishments. This may not be appropriate to express otherwise since self congratulation is not very Japanese. If it's allowed and even encouraged in writing, it may be a welcome affirmation. Whether blowing off steam or blowing their own horn, writing about it appears to help student affect either way.

### Why Written Feedback Rather Than Oral?

While oral feedback has a long list of benefits, written feedback shares many of them and has a few advantages of its own. Like oral feedback, written feedback requires the students to think about their role in the learning process, allows the teacher to get an idea of how the learning is going for the students and strengthens the sense of class community. Written feedback can remain anonymous, is somewhat permanent, leads to in depth reflection and allows the teacher to hear from all the students equally.

One thing that honest and useful feedback relies on is a sense of trust in the classroom community (Watts 1990). Trust takes time to establish, but while it's building, students and teachers can still gain something from the feedback cycle. If student feedback is initially anonymous - something that is only possible with a written format – they can begin learning what feedback is about and how it works without feeling that they are risking much in doing so. Trust can be built as students see what becomes of their feedback. There is no punishment or negative consequence for grievances aired or tentative boasting. Instead it is read, respected and responded to. Once feedback writing is no longer a strange or suspicious activity, students can write their names on it or even keep an ongoing log as a record for their teacher and themselves. In my own experience,

I collected feedback sporadically and anonymously during the first semester. Then during the second semester, students wrote their comments weekly on the back of their participation records. This emphasized the link between their own efforts to be more active in discussions and the way that they experienced each class.

Such a log helps students mark their progress, both in terms of their language learning and their growing awareness of what works for them. This record is informative for the student and the teacher in their joint pursuit of the learning. It adds to the sense of building something up, working towards something. Our memories are not as strong as we often give them credit for, and without keeping track, we would otherwise forget a large part of what our original intentions were, how our plans had altered, all the work along the way, the small but regular efforts to meet our goals. A log is a testimony of the work.

A written testimony is likely to bring forth something different than an oral testimony. Writing leads to deeper reflection. Many students are more likely to feel comfortable expressing themselves in writing and may therefore explore questions or feelings more deeply. With the nature of journal writing, thought leads to thought and we can find a train of thought leads us to places we didn't know existed in our mind, to new levels of understanding. "It has become commonplace to characterize the act of writing as a meaning making, purposeful, evolving, recursive, dialogic, tentative, fluid, exploratory process" (Zamel, 1992: 463). Writing clarifies our thinking.

Furthermore, because they're submitted in written form, these clarified thoughts have an equal chance to reach the teacher. While some students are able to express themselves during oral feedback, others are very nervous and unable to concentrate on

what is being said until their turn has come and they've quickly contributed some minimal response to escape notice. Collecting written feedback allows the teacher to hear from everyone, not just the confident speakers or squeaky wheels. Besides individual personality traits, the culture of the group may lend itself more readily to written rather than oral feedback.

In cultures where ongoing feedback is subtler or in cases where the teacher is not adept at decoding it, written feedback can reveal whole worlds of thought and experience she could only have guessed at. Alternatively, in cultures where ongoing feedback is loud and clear to the teacher, she can use written feedback to focus students' attention on particular aspects of their learning, and thereby avoid being overwhelmed by too much information herself. The written format gives an extra measure of control to the giver and receiver of feedback.

Structured written feedback is a great tool for students to communicate with their teacher and themselves as learners about how the learning is going and what directions might lead to progress. Teachers and students alike learn when structured feedback is solicited, and written feedback in particular has many benefits for those working with it.

### Why Publish Feedback Back to the Class?

Eliciting structured feedback is helpful and informative for the students as well as the teacher. Once the teacher has collected and read the feedback, there are many good reasons to share what has been offered with the whole class. In order to make further use of the feedback, I published it; that is, I typed up a selection of anonymous excerpts and distributed copies to the class. By publishing the feedback, we can extend its benefits to

other students as individuals as well as the class as a whole, enhancing the sense of community. There is a positive impact on classroom affect when we are reminded of our shared purpose in the class, given models of thinking about learning and feedback content, stimulated to re-examine attitudes and awareness and affirmed as a member of the classroom community. In our classes, after spending time reading and working with the published feedback in class activities, students were aware that other students were equally hesitant to make mistakes in front of them but were taking a stab at it all the same. They began to write about how they encouraged their discussion partners and vice-versa. There was noticeably more participation from my perspective, and their reflection logs affirmed that students were aware of this and proud of their progress.

Class atmosphere and affect get a boost when students have an opportunity to read and consider the feedback their classmates have offered. Feedback reveals much that would otherwise go unexpressed. Writing feedback requires reflection, which inherently brings out a personal message that can be shared to create a sense of community. Even when the feedback is published anonymously, there is an increased awareness of who the people in the class are. If we read that a classmate felt successful or supported or frustrated, we don't need to know who it was to feel some empathy. Just as the teacher can gain insight into her students' learning, the class can gain a sense of shared purpose through reading about how classmates are experiencing the learning situation. Students who empathize with their classmates want to support one another's learning efforts.

One thing students can learn from each other as they read one another's excerpts is how to give feedback. In addition to seeing how other students are thinking and

feeling about the shared learning experience, students can also see concrete and real examples of what I'm asking from them in their reflection logs. As students read examples of thoughtful responses that their classmates have written, they can get ideas for things to discuss in their own reflection. Giving useful feedback does not come naturally for most of us. It is a learned skill that takes practice and guidance. By publishing excerpts from students' written feedback, the whole class can see examples of students' informative comments from reflection on their learning or expressions of their affect. Publishing sets up a kind of peer modeling that helps students learn what useful feedback looks like. For example, many students were initially writing comments such as, "Good." "Today's class was fun." "Today's class was difficult." Once we'd worked with several rounds of published feedback, most students were adding more detail in their comments. For example, "I enjoyed today's class because I learned a lot of new words and I was able to support my classmates well, I think," or, "I couldn't volunteer for the class. I felt a little nervous. Next time I want to be the first to express my opinion."

In addition to modeling the content of feedback, publishing it also helps raise awareness of the variety of learning styles, goals and strategies that different students in the class are working with. Students who are struggling to identify these for themselves can read comments from classmates who are more directed or more aware of their learning. Publishing offers models of the meta-cognitive reflection process that giving feedback can engender.

If they're stuck in a rut, for example if they feel that discussion is too hard because they're shy, they can now see that others wrote about that too, but went on to add that they managed to contribute three comments to a discussion. These are classmates in

the same boat who set reasonable goals and then celebrated meeting some of them with a, “Yeah! I did it!” Reading these hitherto inner thoughts might be their first clue that others are dealing with the same challenge but in a different way.

Awareness of themselves as learners affects students’ attitudes about the learning, too. As they are increasingly aware of what is going on “in and between” themselves in learning situations, students’ attitudes towards the content, the class and themselves as learners will likely shift. If they began with a certain impression of the difficulty or manageability of the content, the growing awareness of the different ways it can be approached will likely cause a shift in that initial impression. If they read about other students’ attempts to grapple with the learning, they may be tempted to experiment with their own learning behaviors and realize that they are not necessarily locked into one pattern of dealing with the content. As awareness expands, attitudes are influenced, too.

Just as students’ view of their learning is broadened by reading their classmates’ feedback, so is awareness of each student’s role as a member of the classroom community. Publishing draws attention to the fact that each student is experiencing the same language-learning situation, although no doubt in different ways. Publishing suggests that these different ways be respected, that students’ learning processes be respected.

A student cannot read excerpts from classmates who are genuinely making efforts to learn and believe that his goofing off only affects himself. If the feedback is saying, “I want to learn something and here is how I’m trying to do it and here is how it’s going,” my sense is that the class as a community would want to support that, so disruptions would begin to be seen as hindering that. There is a consciousness of community that is



raised and maintained through publishing feedback. Students become aware of their responsibility for their own learning as well as their measure as participants in the class. The teacher, the students and the class as a whole benefited from the activities we did using their published feedback excerpts. We all gained a greater understanding of what students were struggling with, how they felt about their progress, their victories and defeats. We saw that there was a lot of support from the class as a community for each learner to take the risks they needed to take in order to stretch and practice and improve their speaking skills. The written feedback was very revealing and encouraging to me as a teacher, and then the byproducts of working with the published excerpts were instructive on many levels for all of us.

In the following chapters I will describe some of the language learning activities that made use of their published feedback.

## CHAPTER 3

### DESCRIPTION OF CLASSROOM APPLICATION

The first time I shared the feedback through publishing, I just gave students a list of representative excerpts from the previous class meeting and went over them, pointing out the different perceptions; some students said the lesson had been fun, while others felt it was too hard, and several students wrote that they wanted to do better next time. I quickly found that one of the main challenges involved in working with published student feedback is just getting students to read it. No matter how jazzed I was about their comments, it was just so much print in a foreign language to my students. Although they dutifully held the paper in front of them as I spoke, they clearly weren't as moved by the content as I was. If I was looking for a way to reconnect us with the energy we had left off with the previous week, giving them a copy of feedback excerpts and reading over them together was just not the right way to go about it.

I decided to use their comments as part of a listening activity, one of their favorite skills to work on. The students were visibly more engaged than the last time I'd published their feedback comments. Next, determined that we should spend more time with the excerpts, I tried using them in an information gap pair work. Once we'd done a couple of activities which incorporated their feedback excerpts, I felt pleased that the students had read closely enough to realize I was publishing student comments and then that they'd gone on to identify their own in print. Still I was convinced the students could get more out of what was being shared if they could attend to the meaning of the

excerpts, so I went on to experiment with activities that got them to engage with the content of their feedback.

I designed the following activities to get the students to read the excerpts with a purpose. The purpose of each activity was progressively complex and the tasks were more sophisticated as students first had to make sense of the excerpts in order to work with them. Initially the aim was to get the students to notice that their feedback was being published and further that it was being treated with respect, leading to more trust in the classroom community. As we continued, I noticed that students also began to learn from one another how to give useful feedback and got ideas for different ways to approach their individual challenge areas. Later we began dealing more specifically with the content of the feedback, still with a language learning purpose but also aiming to enhance the class atmosphere by increasing the level of support in the community.

The following seven activities all somehow incorporate the students' published feedback as the content for warm-ups or transition exercises, as they are sometimes called. For each, I give a bit of background information, and then name the language learning objectives as well as the feedback learning objectives. Next, I lay out the steps for conducting the activity in sections labeled Preparation and Procedure. Finally, I provide an example, along with suggested tips and variations.

This first activity is a way to get students initially to look at the excerpts. The exercise allows students to see their own written feedback reappear in print along with that of their classmates, thereby *noticing* the publishing, saving work on the content of the feedback for a later time. This was the first true activity we did using their feedback, and I picked it because I had tried it with different material before and other students had

enjoyed it, so I was confident that these students would also have a positive experience. Everyone makes mistakes, including the teacher. Students had fun being the ones to catch the teacher's mistake in this listening exercise.

## #1 CATCH THE TEACHER'S MISTAKE

**Language Learning Objectives:** practice listening skills, especially phonemic discrimination

**Feedback Learning Objectives:** notice their anonymous published feedback, enjoy ourselves leading to positive affect

### Preparation:

1. Choose feedback excerpts that represent the range of responses from the class.
2. Print them in list form.
3. Choose five or so words to change to similar sounding words on your copy.
4. Make enough copies for each student.

### Procedure:

1. Distribute copies and explain to students that you are going to read out some samples of the feedback from a recent class.
2. Explain that you are going to make five (or x number of) mistakes and it will be their job to listen carefully to catch the mistakes.
3. Tell them that you will read it twice and that they will have a chance to check with their partners. They should circle the word that you make the mistake on.
4. Read through the feedback excerpts making changes to the script in five places.
5. Give students structures for working with their partner and identifying the mistakes and providing corrections if they have any. They only need to fill each blank with one word, so it's short.

S/he made a mistake in number \_\_\_\_\_ .  
S/he didn't say \_\_\_\_\_ .  
Instead of \_\_\_\_\_, s/he said \_\_\_\_\_ .

6. Let them conference with their partners using these structures and repeat.
7. Provide alterations in the structures so that students can address you when volunteering corrections. "S/he" becomes "you."

You made a mistake in number \_\_\_\_\_ .  
You didn't say \_\_\_\_\_ .  
Instead of \_\_\_\_\_, you said \_\_\_\_\_ .

8. Solicit volunteers for corrections. To allow as many students to participate in this phase as possible, for each 'mistake' have one student identify the number, another student identify the word you mistook and a third student guess what word you substituted, in that order.
9. Ask the students if they can identify their own feedback within the list.

**Example of Catch the Teacher's Mistake**

Discussion & Debate IV: End of first semester feedback (Students' Copy)

**Things I liked about discussion were:**

1. Thinking about one topic deeply \*
2. That I can change my mind \* \* \* \*
3. Working together with everyone in the group \* \*
4. Hearing different students' answers \* \* \* \* \* \* \* \*
5. That I was able to say my true opinion, not one I don't believe in \* \* \* \*

**Things I disliked about discussion were:**

6. When we couldn't reach a conclusion \* \* \* \*
7. That we had to say our own opinion because I'm shy \* \*
8. That it was difficult to invite and interrupt \*
9. When I couldn't answer quickly \* \* \*
10. When I was not able to express my opinion \* \*

Discussion & Debate IV: End of first semester feedback (Teacher's Copy)

There are five substitutions in *italics*; the real word follows (*in parentheses*).

**Things I liked about discussion were:**

1. Thinking about one topic *freely* (*deeply*)
2. That I can change my mind
3. Working together with everyone in the *groove* (*group*)
4. *Sharing* different students' answers(*hearing*)
5. That I was able to say my true opinion, not one I don't believe in

**Things I disliked about discussion were:**

6. When we couldn't reach a conclusion
7. That we had to *spray* our own opinion because I'm shy (*say*)
8. That it was *different* to invite and interrupt (*difficult*)
9. When I couldn't answer quickly
10. When I was not able to express my opinion

### Tips:

- Number the excerpts for ease of reference.
- Plan your 'mistakes' in advance because it's difficult to come up with appropriately challenging ones on the spot.
- Read the text with the substitutions as naturally as possible, without giving students paralinguistic hints about where the substitution is. This does not mean read it faster, but rather don't emphasize the substituted word because it gives it away.
- Try substituting words that might work in that place anyway syntactically:
  - [I liked] that it was *different* (*difficult*) to invite and interrupt
- Try substituting words that have the same vowel sound(s):
  - [I disliked] thinking about one topic *freely* (*deeply*)
- Make it more challenging by working on sounds that are more difficult for them to discriminate: minimal pairs or near minimal pairs that the language group finds challenging: b/v, l/r, sh/s, etc. For example, p/f and b/v are challenging for Japanese speakers (bilabials and labiodentals are difficult for them to distinguish).
  - [I liked] working together with everyone in the *groove* (*group*)
- If length is a concern, represent similar feedback by following a repeat with an asterisk or some such symbol.

### Variations:

- Don't tell them how many mistakes in advance; let that be one of the things they tell you.
- Once they're familiar with the task, let students 'make mistakes' for their partners to catch. Students will also need time to devise the distracters ahead of performing them.
- Add an element of competition to unite the class. If they can correctly identify which word you changed, a point for them; if not, a point for you. If they can then correctly identify the word that you substituted, another point for them; otherwise, you get a point.

*Catch the Teacher's Mistake is based on a suggestion in NEW ENGLISH FIRSTHAND Teacher's Book. Mark Helgesen, Lingual House.*

In the previous activity I had asked students to identify their own feedback, so each student has already seen his or her own comment published. However, the content or meaning of the other pieces of feedback was not addressed. Now that students had seen their own feedback published back to them and had at least looked at the feedback as they listened to it read out, I felt it was time to give some attention to what it was their classmates were saying. This next activity asks students to read other students' feedback for content and to try to relate to or react to what they've said about their learning experience. I was not looking for a highly developed reaction, just a brief nod to each of nine or ten pieces of published feedback.

Students were keeping an ongoing log of learning reflection, which I was able to draw upon for feedback. Since we only met once a week, the published feedback was necessarily delivered well after the actual learning experience. I wanted students to reconnect with their own learning experiences by reading back over their reflection entries from a given class discussion (new topics each week) and comparing them to anonymous excerpts from their classmates' entries. This gave them a reason to read their writing and reflect on the experience again. If students can connect with what they were thinking and feeling in a lesson a week or two prior, this can serve as a shortcut to reviving the energy and determination (guts) it takes to get into another activity that requires willingness to take risks, our weekly challenge. For most students, this seemed to be an effective and meaningful way to jumpstart their English speaking persona and get ready for new discussions. In this next activity, students respond to the feedback excerpts by drawing happy, straight or sad faces, depending on the degree to which their feedback entry for the given day agreed with that of their classmate's.

## #2 MAKING FACES

**Language Learning Objectives:** reading practice, read classmates' edited writing, rely on one's own written account of a learning experience to make a comparison

**Feedback Learning Objectives:** read classmates' feedback excerpts with a view to comparing their learning experiences to one's own, react briefly, note that different perceptions and opinions are accepted and respected, examine excerpts as examples for effective feedback

### Preparation:

1. Choose feedback excerpts to publish. Perhaps there isn't time or space to include everyone's, but try to represent the diversity among what's offered.
2. Publish the excerpts along with the dates they were written and titles of activity's or topics that they refer to so that students can easily locate their own writing pertaining to the same dates and activities in their reflection log if they keep one.
3. After each excerpt, draw a short line on which students can indicate their reaction.
4. Make enough copies for each student.

### Procedure:

1. Share one of the excerpts on the board and ask students to recall that day's activity and their response to it. If they keep learning/reflection logs, they can use them to jog their memories. For example,  
12/10 (Topic: The Environment – Class Survey)  
“I enjoyed this class. I want to carry my own shopping bag.”\_\_\_\_.
2. Ask students to consider whether or not the excerpt on the board is similar or very different from what they wrote at the time. If it is a little different, can they still relate to what the person is saying? Can they identify with them?
3. Tell students that they are going to read a selection of such excerpts and they are going to demonstrate their reaction to each by drawing faces next to them.
  - A happy face will show that your feelings or ideas at the time were similar. ☺.
  - A straight face will show that your reaction was different, but that you can relate to or identify with that person's perspective. 😐.
  - A sad face will show that you cannot agree or identify with that person's feedback. ☹.
4. Have students share their reactions with a partner and see if they have any in common. This gets them speaking in English.
5. Pairs can share out with the class an excerpt they agreed with. This gets student voices warming up the English atmosphere. They have the safety of a grammatically correct sentence to quote and the knowledge that they're sharing an opinion others have already expressed.



**Example of Making Faces:**

*Speech and Discussion, fall 2006*

**Read these student comments and demonstrate your reaction to each by drawing faces next to them.**

- A happy face will show that your feelings or ideas at the time were similar. ☺.
- A straight face will show that your reaction was different, but that you can relate to or identify with that person's perspective. 😐.
- A sad face will show that you cannot agree or identify with that person's feedback. ☹.

**12/10 (Topic: THE ENVIRONMENT, class survey)**

*I enjoyed this class. I want to carry my own shopping bag. \_\_\_\_.*

Today's class was interesting. I already share the bath water with my family, and I will reuse it for the laundry. \_\_\_\_.

**1/14 (Topic: WHY DON'T YOU ACCEPT US?)**

I was very surprised by today's class!!! I don't know about gays; why do they love the same sex? Today was hard. \_\_\_\_.

**I think today's topic is important in society. "I say if more gay couples lived openly, it would be easier for society to accept them." \_\_\_\_.**

**1/21 (Topic: ORGAN DONATION)**

I HAVE NEVER DONATED BLOOD, BUT I'LL TRY TO DONATE SOME AT THE NEXT CHANCE BECAUSE IF I'M A PATIENT, I'LL BE IN TROUBLE. \_\_\_\_.

**I was able to say more about today's topic. I'd donate my body parts after I die. \_\_\_\_.**

**1/28 (Topic: FINAL SPEECH PRACTICE in small groups)**

**I enjoyed this class because I listened to my group members' ideas. Each person wrote about a different unit, and each had different strong and weak points. \_\_\_\_.**

I like discussion, but I'm poor at giving speeches, so I couldn't make gestures. \_\_\_\_.

*Today's class was exciting. I could say my opinion. I think I am getting used to speaking English. \_\_\_\_.*

**Tips:**

- Use a different font for each student's feedback as a way to highlight the diverse 'voices.'
- If you aren't going to publish an excerpt from each student this time, keep a record of whose you have used. Then you can begin your next excerpt activity by looking at the feedback from students who haven't been heard from yet.

**Variations:**

- Think of other symbols that students could use to indicate their reactions.
- Have students expand on the symbols; they can make other kinds of faces to refer to different reactions, or perhaps come up with their own symbols.

In the previous activities students have seen their own feedback published anonymously, heard it read out by their teacher and classmates, and compared and contrasted their own feelings about the learning with their classmates' perceptions. They have hopefully noted that different feedback is honored and accepted, and they are getting a sense of how the other students are experiencing the language learning experience in our class. Now they look again at the content, but this time with a view to appreciate the variety of not only the opinions but also of the things that we reflect on in learning logs or what feedback can address. Students use their detective skills, their reading and vocabulary knowledge, to put the excerpts into meaningful and appropriate categories. Then they are asked to justify their decision by identifying the word or phrase that persuaded them of its place.

### #3 CATEGORIES

**Language Learning Objectives:** reading skills, build vocabulary awareness

**Feedback Learning Objectives:** observe the variety of opinions expressed and topics addressed in student feedback

#### **Preparation:**

1. Look at written student feedback and decide what elements you want to focus on.
2. Pull out something from each student's feedback that addresses the element(s) that you have in mind.
3. Arrange the excerpts in categories that highlight these elements. For example, categories might include comments on materials, on content, on an activity, on the learning process, successes and challenges with that process, etc.
4. Print the feedback excerpts out so that they can be cut into separate strips, one sentence (one piece of feedback) per strip.
5. Make title strips for the categories, too.  
For example: discussion topic, language work & activities.
6. Provide students a structure or frame for talking about the placement.  
For example:  
"I think this must/should/might go in this category because of the word(s) ..."
7. Make enough copies and sets of strips and titles for each pair or group of students.

#### **Procedure:**

1. To introduce this activity to the class, prime the pump by putting the category titles on the board and sharing one of the feedback strips. Ask students to consult with their partners and decide which category it belongs in and which vocabulary word or phrase served as their clue.
2. Discuss their answers and their vocabulary detective work as a class. Underline the word or phrase that they think is the key clue.
3. Give the class a couple more examples for different categories, highlighting the vocabulary that links each piece of feedback with the chosen category.
4. When they seem to have the idea of the category titles and the kind of vocabulary that could relate to them, give each pair or small group a set of the feedback strips and category titles, and let them work together to arrange their placement.
5. Have pairs or small groups compare their answers and practice justifying their answers for any discrepancies.
6. Check answers with the whole class to see if there is agreement about the categories. Students should volunteer the clues, the key words, and those could be written under the category titles on the board.

**Example of CATEGORIES feedback sentence strips**

Topic	Language skills & strategies	Activities
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**Comments from 1/17**

It is difficult for me to tell the difference between <i>sometimes</i> and <i>usually</i> .
Today I think that I was very active, so I want to keep being this way.
Today I enjoyed this class because I was moving, moving, moving.
I really enjoyed using gestures because they help me not to be shy. My plan is to raise my hand every class.
This class was very fun because I could take a hard look at my daily life.

**Comments from 12/3**

I was a little tired, but I enjoyed studying, “How Big is Your Footprint?”
I understood today’s topic very well.
Today I could say more to my partner, and I challenged my partner.
Today’s class was very interesting. I imagined my partner’s lifestyle.
Today’s game looked like a spider web. The woolen yarn surprised me!

**Tip:**

- If the teacher is determining the categories, make sure that there is a word or phrase in each excerpt that serves as a clear indication that the feedback belongs in the category that you have in mind.

**Variation:**

- Once students have had experience with this kind of activity, or if they need a greater challenge, they can come up with categories on their own.

**Answer Key for Categories****Topic**

This class was very fun because I could take a hard look at my daily life.

I understood today's topic very well.

Today's class was very interesting. I imagined my partner's lifestyle.

**Language skills & strategies** Today I could say more to my partner, and I challenged my partner.

I really enjoyed using gestures because they help me not to be shy. My plan is to raise my hand every class.

It is difficult for me to tell the difference between *sometimes* and *usually*.

Today I think that I was very active, so I want to keep being this way.

**Activities**

Today I enjoyed this class because I was moving, moving, moving.

I was a little tired, but I enjoyed studying, "How Big is Your Footprint?"

Today's game looked like a spider web. The woolen yarn surprised me!

The next activity is an information gap exercise (Rinvolucri 1988) that works on listening and speaking skills, areas which my students expected to spend class time working on. It's also a lot of fun and should positively impact class affect. Each student has part of the published feedback and will need their partner to dictate the part that is missing. Students may empathize with their classmates through this mouthing of their feedback. To build on that, students then choose an excerpt to respond to empathetically in writing. If they then share their response with their partner or even the class, they are warming up their English speaking persona and getting in the mindset for the new day's discussion activity.

## #4 MUTUAL DICTATION

**Language Learning Objectives:** practice listening and speaking skills, in particular clarifying strategies, practice reading and writing

**Feedback Learning Objectives:** review and recite a variety of perspectives, move towards empathy with anonymous students

### **Preparation:**

1. Choose five to ten excerpts that represent the variety of student feedback from a given lesson.
2. Once you've typed them up, copy and paste the published excerpts so that you have two identical copies of the feedback.
3. Label one copy Student A and the other Student B.
4. Create an information gap exercise. One way to do this is by removing a word from each sentence on Student A's version and replacing it with a series of small blanks, one for each letter in the now missing word.
5. Do the same for Student B's version, choosing different words to replace.
6. Make copies of Student A's version for half the class and Student B's version for the other half.

### **Procedure:**

1. Students who have not used information gap exercises before will need to see this modeled to stress the importance of not looking at one another's papers.
2. Model the language needed for pair dictation.  
For example:  
"How do you spell \_\_\_\_\_?"  
"Could you repeat that?"
3. Pairs should sit facing each other, the student with version A dictating to his/her partner with version B and then vice versa to complete the published feedback pair dictation.
4. When they have finished, they should compare their papers to check for accuracy.
5. Ask students to choose one of the pieces of published feedback to write a response to. You might want to ask them to respond in terms of their own learning goals and strategies.
6. Students can share part or all of their responses with their partner or even the class as they may feel braver about agreeing with or supporting what someone else has written.

**Example of Mutual Dictation:**

**Feedback January 11, 2000 (fair / free trade, Part II)**

My goal is to speak \_\_\_\_\_ fluently. I could speak without using *katakana* English.

My goals are speaking clearly and taking risks. I'll try hard to reach \_\_\_\_\_ .  
We had a short discussion about \_\_\_\_\_ trade. The topic is interesting, but it is difficult.

**Feedback January 18, 2000 (traditional / non-traditional couples)**

Today's topic was very interesting for me. I \_\_\_\_\_ my opinions and took part in this class. Plus, I was \_\_\_\_\_ to hear many other opinions.

I couldn't volunteer for the class. I felt a little nervous. Next \_\_\_\_\_ I want to be the first to express my opinion.

**Feedback January 25, 2000 (refugees, Part I)**

I enjoyed class today \_\_\_\_\_ I learned a lot of new words and I was able to support my classmates well, I think.

Today's class was \_\_\_\_\_ to understand for me. I learned the names of some countries and about Hao Truong's life, and so on. The last \_\_\_\_\_ was very interesting, so I want to play again.

**Feedback January 11, 2000 (fair / free trade, Part II)**

My \_\_\_\_\_ is to speak more fluently. I could speak without using *katakana* English.

My goals are speaking clearly and taking risks. I'll try \_\_\_\_\_ to reach them.  
We had a short \_\_\_\_\_ about fair trade. The \_\_\_\_\_ is interesting, but it is difficult.

**Feedback January 18, 2000 (traditional / non-traditional couples)**

Today's topic was very interesting for me. I said my opinions and \_\_\_\_\_ part in this class. Plus, I was able to hear \_\_\_\_\_ other opinions.

I couldn't volunteer for the class. I \_\_\_\_\_ a little nervous. Next time I want to be the first to express my opinion.

**Feedback January 25, 2000 (refugees, Part I)**

I enjoyed class today because I learned a lot of new words and I was \_\_\_\_\_ to support my classmates well, I think.

Today's class was easy to understand for me. I learned the names of \_\_\_\_\_ countries and about Hao Truong's life, and so on. The last game was very interesting, so I want to \_\_\_\_\_ again.

**Tips:**

- If you are going to include step 5 from Procedures and have students write responses to the excerpts, be sure to choose excerpts that will lead them to think about the aspects of learning that you want to concentrate on.
- To help students respond empathetically to an excerpt, you could give them a prompt such as, “I can understand you,” or “I can imagine how you feel.” Examples of such written responses can be seen in the following activity, MATCHING FEEDBACK AND RESPONSE.

**Variations:**

- To increase the level of challenge, students should try guessing the first letter of a word if they want help with spelling it. In the same way, they should repeat the words they *did* catch and use intonation to indicate the place where they need a word to be repeated.
- Instead of little blank space for each missing letter, use a single blank to replace an entire word no matter its length.
- Remove half of the words in a given text rather than just one or two per sentence. You could remove every other word, or you could remove phrases, natural chunks of words. Do the same for Student B’s version, making sure to eliminate all the words Student A still has while leaving all the words that A is missing.
- Have students sit across the room from their partner so that they need to really speak up to be heard. You can even play music and turn it up bit by bit to add to the challenge. This is fun and ensures that they won’t be looking at one another’s paper. (Rinvoluceri 1988: 72)
- Add an element of competition by having pairs race to complete the dictation. They will need to have their papers face down until you say, “Go!” Winners need accuracy as well as speed.
- Students can make guesses beforehand about what word(s) might work in the blanks and then confirm or correct as they get dictation.
- If you want students to spend less time on the dictation itself (perhaps they’ve already done this type of exercise once) but still share the feedback orally and practice the use of intonation for clarification, try taking out just one or two words per sentence for each version. This makes it more natural in that the speaker doesn’t know which word(s) the listener is missing and will need to be stopped and cued as to which part to repeat.



Students have written a response to published feedback and now this activity involves publishing some of the responses as well. Like the other activities, it gets students to read their classmates' feedback and it further builds community by demonstrating in their own words that the members of the class understand and support each other. Although this activity starts out quietly and comfortably with reading, it then calls for conferencing and sharing out, a nice transition to the day's discussion activities.

## #5 MATCHING FEEDBACK AND RESPONSE

**Language Learning Objectives:** practice reading skills, identify key vocabulary, make logical and linguistic connections to find matches

**Feedback Learning Objectives:** experience giving support and getting support from classmates

### **Preparation:**

1. Collect responses to published feedback (as in step 5 from Pair Dictation Procedures).
2. Read through the responses and look for ones that give clear hints about which piece of feedback they're responding to.
3. Re-publish the few you've selected followed by a section with the responses arranged randomly.
4. Make enough copies for each student.

### **Procedure:**

1. Explain to the students that they have written responses to this feedback and that they will now have a chance to read some of the responses.
2. Their task is to match the response to the original piece of feedback using their detective skills (logical and linguistic).
3. They should underline the words that serve as clues for them as they make their decisions.
4. Give them a structure for talking about possible matches. For example:  
Perhaps 'c' is a response to #1 because of the word(s) \_\_\_\_\_.
5. Students can work individually and then check with their partner to see if their answers agree.
6. Pairs can then check with other pairs.
7. Have students volunteer pieces of the puzzle.  
Our group agrees that 'c' is a response to #1 because of the word(s) \_\_\_\_\_.

### Example of Matching Feedback and Responses:

1. When each of us expresses our *various opinions*, it feels interesting.
2. *I did well* warming up. I could think of what was related to today's topic with my partner. I listened carefully and *I asked my friend* for the answers, but I couldn't speak only in English.
3. Today's topic was *difficult*, so I didn't participate very much. Also, I spoke English in a katakana style. *I want to speak much more clearly.*

A

Dear Classmate,

I agree with you because *my English is very poor*, so if I wanted to say something, I couldn't remember the words. And *today's topic was very hard* for us, wasn't it? We couldn't discuss or debate enough. Don't you think that if we had had an easier one, we could have discussed it more?

B

Dear Classmate,

I understand you because *you were active* and we could discuss the topic. I understood your ideas and you understood mine. I expressed my ideas in English and I tried hard to speak in English, but *sometimes we spoke Japanese*. When I didn't know how to express myself, you supported me. Thank you very much.

C

Dear Classmate,

I understand you. What you say makes sense. It was very surprising for me to hear your thoughts. You and I had *different points of view*, so I was taught another point of view. I had never thought of such a viewpoint. I enjoy talking to my classmates. It's *very fun*. Let's talk about many topics and exchange opinions.

**Tips:**

- Put numbers on the original feedback for ease of reference.
- Put letters on the responses to keep them distinct from the original feedback.

**Variation:**

- To make it easier, you could highlight the clue words or put them in italics, as in the sample above.

After some weeks of soliciting and publishing written student feedback, ideas on content and purpose of feedback begin to solidify. The focus of feedback thus far has been on the day-to-day learning experiences in our class. This chart has a broader focus on the class as a whole and emphasizes each student's role along side that of the teacher for productive use of class time. This serves to heighten awareness of each student's responsibility for the success of the class as a whole. With this activity, we collect and share useful feedback from each member of the class. Each student speaks. Each student's feedback is represented. By the end of the activity, everyone has already spoken in English to the whole class, which listened carefully. The content has essentially been a self-talk pep talk for the class as a whole with all kinds of great ideas and good intentions from the students to apply right away. It's a fun cognitive and affective warm up that should get everyone ready for the next class activity.

**#6 MID-TERM FEEDBACK CHART:**

This activity will need to take place over at least two class meetings, which I've labeled Phase 1 and Phase 2 below.

**Language Learning Objectives:** practice reading, writing, listening and speaking skills

**Feedback Learning Objectives:** expand feedback subject matter beyond the performance of the student and teacher to include classmates and the class as a whole, identify own role in other students' learning experiences

**Preparation for Phase 1:**

1. Make copies of a feedback chart with spaces to write suggestions for each of the following: I (the student) should, the teacher should, the class should, and X (another student whose name we won't mention) should; add three columns labeled more, less, the same.

**Procedure for Phase 1:**

1. Remind students of the kind of things they've been writing about in their feedback comments. For example, perhaps they've been focusing on what helps or hinders their learning, and their feelings of success and frustration as they practice their learning strategies and work towards their learning goals.
2. Tell them that a mid-term evaluation chart will allow them to reflect on how the class members are helping and hindering their learning, and make requests or suggestions based on what they feel will work for them in the second half of the course.
3. Distribute the chart and solicit a few examples of things some students should do more of, making it clear that we're still talking about how to get the most out of our class time. For example, my students said that they should raise their hand more often. Others felt they should make more eye contact. These examples can go on the board and if students feel that one of them applies, they can copy it into their "I should / more" square.
4. Do the same for the "I should / less" and "I should / the same" squares to get examples of behavior that students know hinders their learning and then to show satisfaction with something they're doing well, respectively.
5. Point out that the "X should" square refers to another student in the class who shall remain nameless. They can imagine the same student for all three boxes (more, less and the same), or they can imagine different individuals for each.
6. Students should complete all the squares thoughtfully.

**Preparation for Phase 2:**

1. Collect the charts and select at least one comment from every member of the class to complete a kind of composite chart.
2. Keep a completed version for yourself and then make a second version that will serve as an information gap for the whole class. That is, remove one word from each piece of feedback and replace it with a blank.
3. Make enough copies for each student.
4. Print out the complete sentences and cut them into sentence strips to give a different one to each member of the class. Better that there be extra than too few.

**Procedure for Phase 2:**

1. Each student gets one information gap version of the chart as well as one 'answer' sentence strip.

2. Let them dictate their sentence to their partner (as they may have done in Pair Dictation) to give them some practice with pronunciation. Remember, it is unlikely that they will be reading their own piece of feedback and they may be dealing with unfamiliar words.
3. Now to complete the chart each student will dictate the sentence they were given to the whole class, going in order left to right, top to bottom for ease of use.

**Sample feedback strips with class copy's blank underlined  
(one sentence per student, randomly)**

**I:**

- I should be more positive in the class.
- I should practice more.
- I should be less shy.
- I should chat with my friend less.
- I should keep challenging my classmates.
- I should keep working on my goals and doing the assignments.

**The teacher:**

- The teacher should choose easier topics.
- The teacher should give us more time for discussion.
- The teacher should speak less Japanese.
- The teacher should explain less quickly.
- The teacher should keep playing Western music.
- The teacher should keep helping us learn how to participate.

**We:**

- We should be braver.
- We should volunteer more often.
- We should be less afraid of making mistakes.
- We should not wait so long before answering.
- We should keep asking questions and not pretend to understand what you said.
- We should keep having a good time in this class.

**X:**

- X should speak in English more.
- X should raise his/ her hand more.
- X should be absent less.
- X should chat less when the teacher is speaking.
- X should keep saying his opinions.
- X should keep being outgoing.

	MORE	LESS	THE SAME
<b>I should...</b>	<p>I should be more _____ in the class.</p> <p>I should _____ more.</p>	<p>I should be less _____.</p> <p>I should _____ with my friend less.</p>	<p>I should keep challenging my _____.</p> <p>I should keep working on my _____ and doing the assignments.</p>
<b>The teacher should...</b>	<p>The teacher should choose easier _____.</p> <p>The teacher should give us more _____ for discussion.</p>	<p>The teacher should speak less _____.</p> <p>The teacher should explain less _____.</p>	<p>The teacher should _____ playing Western music.</p> <p>The teacher should keep helping us _____ how to participate.</p>
<b>We should...</b>	<p>We should _____ braver.</p> <p>We should volunteer more _____.</p>	<p>We should be less afraid of _____ mistakes.</p> <p>We should not wait so _____ before answering.</p>	<p>We should keep asking questions and not pretend to _____ what you said.</p> <p>We should keep _____ a good time in this class.</p>
<b>X Should...</b>	<p>X should _____ in English more.</p> <p>X should raise his or her _____ more.</p>	<p>X should _____ absent less.</p> <p>X should chat less _____ the teacher is speaking.</p>	<p>X should keep _____ his opinions.</p> <p>X should keep being _____.</p>

(the chart was suggested to me by Mario Rinvolucri)

**Tips:**

- Consider assigning completion of this chart as homework and setting a minimum number of words for a passing grade (100 words or so).
- You may want to stipulate that they cannot repeat themselves from square to square, or not more than one or two repetitions. You don't want a chart full of, "I should volunteer more, we should volunteer more, X should volunteer more, and even the teacher should volunteer more."
- Have students return to the "I" and the "We" sections both on their individual charts and the class composite chart, and highlight anything they want to keep in mind.
- Out of the many suggestions/requests that come from the students in the "Teacher should/more/less" sections, select ones that seem reasonable for you to work on. For example, if "The teacher should speak less quickly," seems like a fair comment, that could be something you agree to work on, hopefully with the support of the students. However, if you have no intention of changing the amount of homework given, you may not want to choose, "The teacher should give less homework," for publishing.

**Variations:**

- Make it into a wall chart. If it's easy for everyone to see the will of the class (or some of it) articulated and writ large, long term and ongoing awareness of our roles will be supported by referring to the chart occasionally, or leaving it there as part of a Suggestopedic background.
- Instead of a one-at-a-time go-around completion of the chart, where the whole class sits quietly and listens to one student dictate a piece of feedback, it could alternately be a whole-class on the move activity in which each student would need to go around and talk to every other student to complete the chart.
- As with Pair Dictation, the words you decide to remove can either be replaced by a one-size-fits-all standard blank, or you can offer more support by replacing the word with a number of small blanks, one for each letter in the missing word.

Students have by now had some experience with reading their classmates' feedback and finding something that they can identify with. Perhaps they've had their own feedback published and had a number of students respond empathetically, validating

their perception of the learning experience in question. They have an increased awareness of what gets talked about in feedback (learning goals and strategies, opinions on discussion topics, likes and dislikes regarding activities, etc).

Much as before, this activity starts with the teacher's assembling feedback excerpts that represent diverse perceptions of a learning experience. Again the students are asked to look through the excerpts and determine which ones they can strongly or even somewhat identify with as well as those they can't relate to. This time it's this last group they will be asked to focus on. They will be asked to choose an excerpt that is quite different from their own response and imagine that person's reasons for feeling or thinking the way he does.

If the student has actually responded that the activity was fun and that they were able to meet their learning and participation goals that day or that their strategies were successful, they should choose an excerpt that complains that the activity was too difficult or very frustrating. On the other hand, if the student is a naysayer, now he will write about why he felt so successful.

## **#7    EMPATHIZING OPPOSITES**

**Language Learning Objectives:** reading and writing practice

**Feedback Learning Objectives:** contrast one's own learning experiences with another's, respond empathetically

### **Preparation:**

1. Choose a few distinctly positive feedback excerpts and a few distinctly negative excerpts to publish. Include just the essential reaction to the activity or the attempted learning and leave out any elaboration or explanation.



2. After each excerpt, draw a long line to indicate a place for elaboration.

For example,

12/10 (Topic: The Environment – Class Survey)

“I enjoyed this class.” \_\_\_\_\_

3. Make enough copies for each student.

**Procedure:**

1. Share one of the excerpts on the board and ask students to recall that day’s activity and their response to it. If they keep learning/reflection logs, they can use them to jog their memories.
2. Ask the students to imagine what comments might follow this statement in the way of explanation. Some examples might be, “I learned a lot of new words,” or “I was able to support my classmate.”
3. Students discuss ideas with their partner for what could follow and then decide on one to volunteer for the class.
4. Write a few of their ideas on the board to indicate that they could easily and logically follow such a statement as “I enjoyed this class.”
5. Distribute the published feedback and ask students to read the excerpts and choose one that is very different from what they wrote at the time.
6. Students imagine that they had the opposite experience from the one they really had. They then fill in the details of the respective feedback to explain why they feel the way they do about that learning experience.
7. Students can share part or all of their responses with their partner or even the class as they may feel braver about agreeing with or supporting what someone else has written.

**Sample Excerpts for Empathizing Opposites:**

**My goal was to speak more fluently, but I used katakana English a lot.**

---

**I couldn’t volunteer my opinion to the class.**

---

**I was able to support my classmates well, I think.**

---

**Today’s class was easy for me.**

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**Tip:**

- Publish the excerpts along with the dates they were written and titles of activities or topics that they refer to for ease of reference.

**Variations:**

- Students could have a luck-of-the-draw experience. For example, students number off and all the 'ones' complete feedback statement number one, the 'twos' number two, etc. This will mean that some students will have to imagine experiences very foreign to their reality, and some will get to justify their own perception with the knowledge that a quarter or a half of the class is trying to see his perspective, too.
- Instead of having students write the imagined details on their own paper working alone, have them work in pairs and write a back up detail to contribute to a class poster or wall display.

## CHAPTER 4

### CONCLUSION

#### Classroom Implications

My Independent Professional Project involved soliciting structured written feedback from students and publishing excerpts back to the class in the form of content for our language learning activities. I found reading student feedback helpful to me in my teaching and later learned that students were benefiting too when they wrote it for me. This led to having the students write it in the form of a learning log, an ongoing record which further served both the individual student and teacher. The sense of community in the class as a whole was strengthened when we attended to what the students were saying about their learning experiences; they were articulating empathy for one another's fears and frustrations, and they were lauding the efforts of their classmates. By voicing these heretofore unspoken thoughts and feelings during activities designed to incorporate their feedback, the students affirmed in their own words their support for one another and encouraged each other to take the necessary risks to perform challenging language learning tasks.

Reading feedback served me as a teacher. Written feedback allowed me to hear from each of the students, which proved to be informative and generally encouraging. This was a resource for reflecting on my teaching and lesson planning for future class meetings.

Writing feedback served students' learning. The very act of writing leads to deeper thinking, and such metacognitive reflection fixes the learning more securely to the

framework of prior knowledge. The learning log helps students mark their progress and learn about themselves as learners to inform their future learning choices. For example, they could realize something useful about their learning styles and preferences, inform their decisions about effective use of study time, and increase awareness of their role in their own learning. Finally, after challenging activities that require risk taking, writing is a good way to let off affective steam or report success.

I learned that publishing student feedback also benefited the class as a community in the following ways: it demonstrated interest in and respect for the students' perspectives; it reminded us of our purpose in the class; it built trust in the feedback cycle and provided models of feedback content and thinking about learning; it stimulated re-examination of attitudes and awareness; it enhanced the sense of the class as a community and affirmed each student as a member of that community.

The activities I described are just a few of the many possible ways to make use of feedback excerpts as content. I arranged them so that the objective gradually shifted from just noticing that student feedback was being published to actually thinking about what was being said in that feedback and finally to actively considering what we could do about it. The activities were all the while developing reading, writing, listening and speaking skills so that the students would view our work as legitimate use of class time.

### Personal Growth

Through the work I did for this Independent Professional Project, I gained a new way to communicate with my students. It allowed me to get an idea of what was going on in their heads, what was on their minds, and how they were feeling about their efforts

to gain fluency in English in my class. By reading their written feedback and publishing excerpts back to the class, I expressed my interest in their perspectives as well as focused our attention in directions I thought would help us progress as a group. Also, by choosing to make their thoughts and opinions part of the content of the class, I communicated respect for them as learners. Although my initial goal was to persuade the students as individuals to take an active role in their learning and get in the mood to take risks during our class, a very pleasant byproduct was the awareness of the community we were and the enthusiastic support students wanted to offer one another in their efforts. Each of the activities I have outlined has several purposes, which reflect the various goals described above. From the student perspective, it was important that we should be working on their English skills, so that's the angle from which I presented the activities to them. However, my agenda also included a focus on the class atmosphere and the students' security level, both in the short term to jumpstart a given class session and in the long term to build the image of our class community as a safe place to take linguistic risks. In this sense, the activities work directly on skills and knowledge, but indirectly and simultaneously on two other important areas: attitude and awareness.

During my studies at the School for International Training, I was introduced to the following framework (termed KASA) as a tool for understanding learning. My explicit goals with the feedback activities fell more into the cognitive quadrants on the left, where the students expected them to be. My implicit objectives, however, fell more into the affective quadrants on the right.

Knowledge	Attitude
Skills	Awareness

I realize now that the work I did with structured written feedback had an unexpected positive impact on my own affect and attitude about the class. I gained an appreciation of the complexity of emotions that lay behind all the hesitation and silence I'd long felt so frustrated with. I grew to feel much more connected with the students as I read of their inner desires to participate actively and their ongoing struggles with making that happen each week. Having some clue of their mixed feelings about the necessary risk taking kept me from getting too discouraged or taking it too personally when no one wanted to make a peep. I felt better about my work with them and got excited about learning from their feedback, looking for ways to provide the right level of the security they craved. I got better at recognizing their successes thanks to their self-reporting, which made our joint efforts that much more rewarding.

I don't know if I'll ever again have the luxury of a schedule that permits me to spend as much time publishing feedback excerpts as I did in Japan, or the impetus of an assignment like this to focus my attention on this kind of project, but in retrospect, I'm more grateful than ever for having had both.