EXPLORATORY LEARNING: THE DIGITAL RECORDER PROJECT

AN INVESTIGATION INTO A STUDENT DESIGNED PROJECT FOR FINDING AND ADDRESSING ESL STUDENTS’ LISTENING AND SPEAKING NEEDS.

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

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This project by Joel Cooke is accepted in its present form.

Date

Project Advisor

Project Reader
ABSTRACT

The Digital Recorder Project was designed to present students with an opportunity to design and implement, as a class, a project that would address speaking and listening issues they experience as ESL students. Each student was required to observe their own speaking via a self-created digital recording and in conjunction with the class, design a unique, individualized method to work on issues he or she identified. This document will present the observations and conclusions about the nature of such a project from the teacher’s perspective. In addition, the paper will use transcripts of class recordings as a means of placing the reader in the classroom to observe the dynamic process of negotiating and creating the direction and output of the project. The aim of this paper is to show how an Exploratory Learning Project, fifteen classes in length, provided the means for students to not only address particular speaking issues, but to acquire skills and insight into their own learning process.

ERIC Descriptors: Project-Based Learning, Pronunciation, Teacher Role, Teaching Methods, Audiotape Recorders, Student Developed Materials
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This paper offers you, the reader, a ground level look at a student-directed learning experiment. You could experience that, close to how I did, with all the crashes and dead ends, with all the light and excitement, by skipping this introduction and starting with the conception of the project on page 12.

Alternatively, you may find the paper more useful by jumping here and there using the headline-type questions you will find in all the early chapters as a way to find areas that connect with your interests. Another way would be to continue to read this introduction for guidance into how this paper was created. And another still would be to go right to the conclusion at the end to see what advice I offer and things I learned about running this style of project.

I don’t suggest a straight read through. I would be surprised if you made it all the way. I like the way one reader of an early draft put it; “Part of (the challenge of reading your paper) may be that I’m reading it straight through, when I should be sampling and mulling around the shop to see what’s there.” I suggest his approach, but find what works for you.
• **Why the question and answer format?**

You probably didn’t know it had one, but it starts from here. I chose it in the attempt to give you better access to questions you might have about this Project. The questions are amalgams of my imagining what a reader might ask, and actual questions colleagues have asked me about the Project in the past.

In the description of day-to-day classroom activities, I use the questions to highlight only what I feel are the most relevant moments of the Project. Therefore, the description of some classes, being more pivotal to the development of the Project, will have more questions, and have longer descriptions of what happened. Within those descriptions, you will find numerous, direct transcripts of what the students and I said in the class. I placed these transcriptions in italics to allow the reader to more easily distinguish them from normal description of the class.

Additionally, in the day-to-day descriptions, the questions give me the option of changing the writing to the present tense. I employ the present tense when I am relaying a lot of description and/or dialogue from the classroom. I realize changing tense risks confusion for the reader. I do this, however, in hopes of giving the reader a closer feel of, not what happened, but what happens in the Exploratory Learning classroom.

• **How is this paper organized?**

The heart of the paper, the description of the project, is chronological. It starts with the conception of the idea for the Project and runs through all the stages
involved, up to and including, feedback and reflection on the Project. It will be both introspective and descriptive in tone. It will look into what is going on in my head, as well as describing and discussing what happened in the classroom. It will include excerpts from the class journal I kept along the journey. The paper will also include excerpts from the digital recording of the class, copies of student work, and documents created by me for the class.

The main sections of the paper are:

- The **Introduction**, which you are reading now, gives an overview of the Project and introduces the core questions I am considering in this paper.
- In **Underpinnings**, I discuss some of the sources that have led me to this approach to teaching.
- The **Conception Stage** talks about how this iteration of Exploratory Learning started to take form as the Digital Recording Project.
- The **Discovery Stage** begins at class 1 and details the challenges of introducing the Project to students and helping them find their speaking and listening needs.
- The **Beginning of Student Generated Proposals** starts at class 7 and focuses on the Project after the students have an idea of what they would like to work on and are creating their own Proposals to address those ideas.
- The Project starts to wind down around class 13 with the section, **Wrapping The Project Up**, where I describe the process for ending the
Project. This section includes the details of student feedback and final student output.

- **Conclusion** is the final section and follows the run of the Project. It is a review and summary of all the core questions explored during the Project as well as what ideas and questions I carry forward into the next round of Exploratory Learning.

- **What are you exploring with Exploratory Learning?**

  In my teaching and in this Project, what interests me most are the boundary lands between student initiative and teacher control. Gray setouts labeled **Observations on the Core Questions** and **Insights** are interspersed throughout the run of the Project and address specifics of that exploration. At the end of the paper, in the chapter entitled Conclusion, I discuss the core questions in detail. The setouts resemble the ones below and address the topics contained within them.

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**The Core Questions**

- **Noticing** – What are students capable of noticing about themselves and what they need to work on vs. being directed by a teacher?
- **Flexibility vs. Form** – How much of the design of the projects can be created by the students vs. given to them by the teacher?
- **Roles** – What issues of control and responsibilities are brought up with Exploratory Learning?
The Core Questions (cont.)

- **Modeling/independence** – How much and what kind of support is most helpful for individual students in exploring their learning?
- **Student interest and motivation** – What encourages student interest and motivation in this style of teaching?
- **Challenging the teacher** – What are the difficulties for the teacher? What is required to protect and grow the teacher?
- **For the future** – What was removed from consideration in this iteration of Exploratory Learning and held for the future?

Insights

These setouts, occurring more towards the end of the Project run, will point insights into learning and teaching of Exploratory Learning that I feel are best illustrated in the flow of the project.

- **Where did you run this Project?**

  This Project was created and run while I was an adjunct instructor at Southern Maine Community College. I was hired as an adjunct instructor to teach two courses. ESL Reading/Writing and ESL Listening/Speaking. This Project took place in the Listening/Speaking class.
• **What were the conditions and expectations of your teaching context for this Project?**

The class is under administration of the English Department at the community college where I undertook the Project. The department currently has 6 full-time benefited teachers and 40 adjuncts. None of the adjunct instructors have offices, desks, phones, or computers. There is no scheduled or paid time for adjuncts to meet with other teachers to share ideas, develop curriculum or establish standards in grading or course expectations.

I argued for and received from the college the pass/fail option for my classes. For the Exploratory Learning Project, I evaluated students on their ability to engage in the Project and create meaningful insights into their learning process and barriers that exist for them in oral communication.

• **Who are the students? Why are they in your classroom?**

The class has a few recent refugees and immigrants, but it is mostly students who had arrived in the United States, sometime during their primary or secondary education. All the students have completed high school, either in the United States, or in another country.

The classes I teach are considered developmental classes and grant no academic credit. Students are placed in my class by scores they receive on the community college’s entrance placement exam. This exam, the Accuplacer, is required of entering students if they have not taken the SAT, or having take it, received a combined score of less than 1000.
The students’ speaking ability ranges from difficult to understand, with a heavy overlay of their native language, to street-savvy hip-hop smooth and cool. Their writing abilities display this same wide range in grammar and conceptual sophistication.

- What attitudes do your students bring to your classroom?

The students in my classroom display a wider range of attitudes than in most community college classes. These range from enthusiasm to outright resentment.

The resentment primarily stems from ambitious students that sense that they are moving backwards in their education. They started in ESL classes in high school upon arrival to this country and later moved up to mainstream classes. Now, when they find themselves in a development English class, they wonder “Why am I back in ESL?”

At the other extreme, I have students who are later arriving in their educational careers, often having completed their education in their native countries or in countries where they were refugees. These students are often highly ambitious and energetic.

- What materials did you create or collect for writing this paper?

I used a digital recorder to make daily recordings of the class. I have copies of all the student-generated recordings used in their Proposals. I compiled a class journal as I was doing the Project. I have copies of all the student Proposals, copies of student feedback, and photos of board work we did in class.
CHAPTER 2
UNDERPINNINGS

• What excites you about this thing you call Exploratory Learning?

I noticed early in my teaching career that I was much more enthusiastic about being a teacher if I didn’t quite know where the class was going. I enjoyed the sense of discovery, not only of what content was revealed, but also of what process developed. I found when I tried to teach with a textbook, I was often losing my connection with where the students were in their learning, because of what was being called for next in the text.

This observation moved me towards finding a different, more flexible method of teaching. I first experimented with a few open-ended teaching ideas (described in more detail below) in a very supportive adult education environment. I found it enormously satisfying and productive. About two years ago, my teaching context changed to a community college. This paper is about one of the journeys I undertook there, teaching without a textbook, in this higher-pressure/greater-expectation learning environment.

I have named the approach detailed in this paper, Exploratory Learning. I choose that label to express the idea that this learning finds its way as to goes. It is my path towards student-directed learning.
• What theoretical model helped you form your understanding of teaching and learning?

If I had to choose one, it would be the Silent Way Method. I first learned of the Silent Way Method via a presentation given by Shakti Gattegno, wife of Silent Way founder Caleb Gattegno, and current lead proponent and spokesperson for the Silent Way Method. In the course of her talk at SIT in the summer of 2003, I heard something to the effect that “You must join the student to find out how they don’t understand. Now you are both students and learning” and “Don’t ever do for the students, what they can do for themselves”. At the time I did not understand the impact these ideas would have on my teaching. But over time, I began to see how the ideas offered by Shakti Gattegno fundamentally changed the teacher/student relation in my classroom. Over time, as a “teacher”, I found myself drawn more and more to the excitement of being a student of my students’ learning. My core question became, “How does this student learn?” I came to see that the student and I were looking in the same direction, perhaps with different perspectives, but now, both as learners.

• What do you know about yourself as a person and what does it have to do with the form of this Project?

I came to realize that I got the most satisfaction out of working on an immediate creative level in the classroom. I agree with a colleague, who when asked what her teaching plan was for the next few weeks, laughed and said she was more worried about what was going to happen in the next five minutes. Over my teaching career, I have too cultivated this edge, moving farther and farther away from a
prescribed plan and closer to discovering and developing what is happening in the classroom now.

- **How did your experience at SIT influence this style of teaching**

  I came to realize, during my time at SIT, that interest and curiosity were the most important source of motivation for my own learning. That sounds simple and obvious to me now. And it is possible that I could have made a very similar statement about my learning before I entered SIT. But the key for me came in this question, “How did I connect this understanding of my learning, to my teaching?” Reflecting on my experience prior to attending SIT, I realized that fundamentally I hadn’t.

- **What experiences in the classroom led you to developing Exploratory Learning?**

  To answer that, I would like to describe one of the experiments in learning I built on this observation, of interest being central to learning, from my previous teaching context in adult education.

  The class was an intermediate level ESL classes containing less than twelve students, coming from four or five ethnic backgrounds. I started bringing nothing prepared in advance for the class lesson. I would begin every class by getting students to talk about whatever was going on in their lives: Divorce, parking tickets, problems with their kids, etc. We would then cooperatively create a story or dialogue from this material, which I would write on the board. From that dialogue, I would create a range of exercises. I list some of them below for illustration.
• Erase a few words from the dialogue on the board and have the class recreate them from memory.

• Erase some of the sentences or parts of the dialogue and recreate those from memory.

• Have each student choose one of the sentences, scramble it and then, one at a time, recite the words, scrambled, to the other students to unscramble.

• Give the students the scrambled sentences and leave a few key words out for students to discover. The words left out would be areas of the language, such as, tense or spelling that I wanted to highlight. Together we would work on these words, as in this case, discovering the rules of usage or the spelling of those words.

• Choose from the sentences or dialogue, with the students, which words they thought the most important and create a class word list for future exercises and reinforcement.

I found basing the curriculum on the lives and the interests of the students, while involving them in creating parts of the daily lesson, proved to be a very productive way to teach. I also discovered how I liked to teach. It was through an exploration of student interest that I felt most at home. This experience, and others like it, from that adult education context formed the foundation that led to Exploratory Learning Projects.
Conceiving the Project

• How did you come up with your initial idea for this Project?

As part of another Project in the Listening/Speaking class in the previous semester, I had each student make a videotape of themselves talking about their experience with that Project. We developed criteria for what a good presentation was, and students were asked to evaluate themselves and each other. It was a first run for me using recording in the classroom. In that videotaping, I noticed not only the power of student self-observation, but also the work to be done with these students on pronunciation and other speaking issues.

With this experience in mind, I started to think on how I could use recording to help the students improve their pronunciation. Over the course of a few weeks, the idea came to me that I could have the students make recordings of themselves, and then, let them create ways of working on what issues they choose as important.

• What was your initial rough vision for how the Project would work?

I set a rough time frame of 8-10 weeks, approximately a half of the semester. My reasoning was that if the Project was a total crash, it would have an endpoint at which time we could get out and re-focus the class on other goals. I estimated that within that time frame, two or three weeks would be needed to set up the Project. As a
class, we would use this time to brainstorm and develop ideas as a group of how students might make use of video recording. The next segment would be used for students to pursue those ideas. I imagined that would take between 4 to 6 weeks. Finally, at the end of the project, we would look at the project as a whole and see what we had accomplished.

- **What were the main concerns you held at this stage?**

  My greatest concern was how to stimulate and maintain student initiative. I vaguely saw how the Project might work but I had the apprehension that students would not be motivated to explore the potential of this Project. I feared students might dig in their heels and refuse to work on it because of the unfamiliarity of the form. Experience has taught me that without a set curriculum or textbook to use, student resistance or ambivalence can become a problem.

  Another major concern was group support. Would the group find a cohesion that would allow them to take the necessary risks to explore what they needed to work on? These Projects depend on students being able to work together and help each other. I know that I don’t have enough ideas on my own. To make an Exploratory Project work I depend on the creativity and enthusiasm of the students.

  A third concern was how we would, over the course of this Project, focus or narrow what we are working on. With the inherent open-ended format of Exploratory Learning, and students choosing their own issues to work on, I was concerned that the Project could become too multi-faceted and complex. A final concern was output. What meaningful output would we create? Not only as useful tools, which the
students might develop in creating and working on their part of the Project, but also as output that connects this Project to the community college context we are working in.

- **How did you assess the students’ needs for the Project?**

  For the Project, I didn’t assess their needs. A core aspect of the Project is to turn that assessment over to the students. I aim to let them decide, as a group and as individuals, what they need to learn.

- **How did you evaluate success and failure of a Project?**

  Most simply, I evaluated it on what it offered us in learning and the sincerity of effort we were able to put into it.
CHAPTER 4

THE PROJECT

The Discovery Stage

Class 1 (Tuesday, August 30)

- *How did you introduce the Project to the students?*

  On the first day of class, as a way of breaking the ice and getting to know each other, we had a group discussion about our lives and educational experiences. We went over the syllabus which included the Digital Recorder Project (originally based on video) I had planned for the class. I briefly touched on it, only saying that we were going to use a video camera to work on speaking and listening. Students immediately asked a number of questions on the specifics of the Project, such as “*Are we going to videotape ourselves?*” I gently deflected the questions by saying that we would decide as a class how to do it. Their first homework assignment was very open ended: Come up with ideas on how to use videotape to improve speaking.

*Observations on the Core Questions*

  **flexibility vs. form**

  Part of the early challenge is finding the balance to much guidance about a Project could look like and creating interest. In this case, the opportunity of videotaping themselves created the interest.
Class 2 (Thursday, September 1)

• **What are the initial ideas that the students come up with?**

  In class, I have students discuss in pairs for 5 minutes the ideas that they came up for homework for use of a video camera. I re-state the objective of the Project "that this is a new Project… and what I want you to do help me do is to develop a good way, not just for yourself but for other ESL students, of using video." While they work, I write the question on the board that I had sent home with them, "How can you use video improve your speaking of English?" I work with the groups, restating and clarifying the question.

  After the five minutes, I ask them to share what they came up with in their discussions. James says, "We can do it two ways. First of all you can use it when you are speaking and playing it back and you hear how you pronounce some words" I condense that a bit and write it on the board. Their other ideas include: The teacher could make a recording of words that were hard to pronounce and students could practice those. Radmilla suggests we make two recordings, one with ESL speakers and one with native speakers having the same discussion. "We could see the way they use the words…” She makes the point that "we use simple words and their vocabulary is more richer." In this manner, students give their ideas and as a group, we refine and clarify them, which I then, acting as secretary, write on the board.
How do you react to the initial student ideas for using video?

Upon listening to the tape of the class, I can hear that I am a bit befuddled about where to go next. There are some good suggestions but I am a bit hesitant, wondering and weighing both student enthusiasm and the “do-ability” of their ideas. In a moment of clarity (or panic), I move some of the responsibility back out to the students “What do you think would be the most helpful to you?” There is little response. In my apprehension about making something happen, I postpone this decision and steer the class towards a simple starting point of making a video of themselves.

Observations on the Core Questions

flexibility vs. form

This challenge for me at this stage was striking a balance between letting students create the form for the project and assuming that responsibility myself. I am asking myself something I will ask myself throughout the Project, “What can the students do for themselves?”

I push the idea of creating questions that the students could talk about, as a way of generating language to record. I move to the board, pick up the chalk and ask, “What kind of question could you talk about for 3 minutes.” Radmilla suggests the question, “What kind of goals are you trying to reach for this class?” Joyce offers “Why is education so important?” James adds, “What are you going to do after graduation?” Lila adds, “How do you celebrate your favorite holiday?” We brainstorm about 6 or seven questions.
Students ask if they can create their own questions (not those we just
generated) to create their recording. I say yes, and give support towards shaping
questions that would create sufficient language to make a 3-minute recording. I
explain I will make them a DVD of the recording and following that, as a class, we will
come up with ideas of what to do with the recording.

**Observations on the Core Questions**

*roles*

I believed my most beneficial role, at this stage, was to help
students develop ideas for recording themselves. I framed the
project as an exploration and expressed the idea that I was
depending on their experience as English learners.
Class 3 (Tuesday, September 6)

• *How did you give the students a frame of reference or the sense of being in a “Project”?*

I decided to create a document that would give an overview of the nature of my thinking on the Project and what ideas we had generated so far. (See attachment 1). This was handed at the beginning of the third class. It listed student suggestions for how to use video to work on speaking, and questions we had brainstormed in class for generating recordings.

**Observations on the Core Questions**

**flexibility vs. form**

Documenting what the class had created gave form and a sense of accomplishment. This lent a steadying feeling to a Project whose endpoint was, yet, unknown.

• *What technology/equipment did you use for the Project?*

I lost easy access to the school’s DVD recorder. That combined with my student’s lack of DVD players at home made me re-consider how I was going to make this Project happen. Facing these issues, I made the suggestion to the students that we switch to audio. Many greeted this with eagerness, belying an unspoken apprehension about being videotaped.

But I only had one recorder and no plan how to use it for the whole class. An on the spot, dancing-with-a-big-smile type of solution came to me. First, I broke the
students into groups of three, with the idea of having the students practice the
question they were going to answer. They would then rotate through the roles of
speaker, questioner and timer. They understood and seemed to easily participate in
their roles. This arrangement allowed all students to be active in some role. The groups
of three also served to create a supportive practice audience.

I was able on that first day of recording somehow to get a 3-minute recording
each of the students. The time required to get the final recordings completed pushed
me past the end of the period. Nonetheless, I was happy to escape the jam of no video
recorder and to smoothly make the change to audio.

- Did any technology and time issues come up with switching to digital audio
  recording?

I was already using a digital recorder to record each meeting of the class. So, it
was a simple transition to let the video recording go for now. I also realized that using
a digital audio recording and burning those files on to a CD was going to be
considerably easier compared to doing the same with the more complicated process of
recording and copying DVDs.
In preparation for the fourth class of the Project, I burned copies of their recordings from my digital recorder onto CDs. I did this at home on my laptop. The

**Observations on the Core Questions**

**roles**

I saw my role at this point as secretary and coach; a secretary who records their progress and keeps the schedule, a coach that supports their ideas and moves them forward.

process of transferring and burning 3-minute files of the ten students in the class took about around 2 hours the first time I did it. By the end of the semester, I had it down to less than 45 minutes.
• **What do students do with their initial test recording?**

At the beginning of class, I hand out individual CDs. Each CD has only the student’s own recording on them. They are surprised and I think quite interested in having a CD of their own speaking to listen to.

**Insights**

There is value in having something tangible, in this case the CD of the students voice, in the intangible mix of an Exploratory Learning Project, that helps the class maintain a focus and interest in what we are working on.

In class, we discuss some ideas of what they can do with the recordings. Some of the students are still unclear about the connection I am making between the recording they made and the idea of creating a Project out of it. We discuss some of the ideas for output that we came up in the previous class. I introduce the word, Proposal, for the first time. This would be an important term as the Project moves forward. I begin to use the word as a way to formalize the way they will present their ideas.

We re-examine what to do with a recording in light of now having an actual recording. Here is what we come up with:

1. Listen to yourself and come up with things you want to work on.
2. Have another person listen to your recording and find out what that person cannot understand.

Both these ideas are basic and fundamental, and in my mind, very useful for moving forward. For homework, I ask them to create and submit two Proposals, one original, of what they could do with their recording.

**Observations on the Core Questions**

**Modeling**

In retrospect, I erred on the side of too little direction. It would have served the students to discuss what a Proposal might look like and developed some criteria. This lack of support around the Proposal plays itself out over the next few classes.

**Motivation**

I hoped that the curiosity of hearing their own recording would stimulate a natural curiosity about themselves and motivate them towards thinking and working on their speaking.
Class 5 (Tuesday, September 13)

- **What did students come up with for initial ideas for working on their speaking?**

  When I asked students in class what they came up with for Proposals over the weekend, I remember the quiet and shifting of the students in their chairs. Teachers are well familiar with this moment in a class, when even the best and brightest have no idea where you are going. I can still feel the spinning in my head of how to escape from the dead end I had put the students in.

  “Well what did you notice about your speaking when you listened to it.” Suddenly, miraculously, the floodgates opened. From my class notes, here is what students said.

  - repeated, unnecessary words (Joyce)
  - shy – lacked confidence (Sahra)
  - pronunciation (Olesya and many others)
  - misplaced words – word order (Eva)
  - disorganized thoughts (Joyce and others)
  - long pauses (Nhi)
  - jumping from one idea to another (Sahra)
  - unnecessary words (Eva)
  - made up some words (Farhia)

**Observations on the Core Questions**

**noticing**

I was stunned by the diversity of what they noticed from their recordings. This cemented for me the importance of placing students in charge of the very first step of Exploratory Learning: Put students in position to see what they need to work on.
Where did you stand, at this stage, in terms of how much control you had and what you would place in the students’ hands?

After we talked about what they noticed, I again asked them for ideas on what they could do to address what they noticed. The room was quiet again. I realized at that point that the responsibility for the overall logistics of the Project was moving into my hands. I also saw that I had blurred the distinction up to this point between Project and Proposal hoping to get them to participate in designing the overall Project (including the format of a Proposal) as well as addressing their individual speaking needs.

**Observations on the Core Questions**

**roles**

I now knew that the students would be overwhelmed by the range of responsibilities that I originally intended to ask of them. At this time, I moved toward assuming more responsibility for the format and progression of the project and narrowed their role toward finding creative ways of working on their speaking skills within a project format that I, to a large degree, would create.

In the days following class 5, I created an overview of the sequence of stages for the Project. I intended to hand it out in class 6. (See attachment 02) We were at the time in Stage 2.5 on this document and finding our way through the Project. At this time and with this document, I assumed a large control over the time frame and the sequence of the Project.
• *Was the digital recorder Project the only class activity you were working on?*

Sometimes the work we would do for the recordings would only take half the class. Much of the work of the Project was at home listening to the recording and working on the Proposal. I felt a responsibility to use the entire class time to work on English speaking skills. Yet, I also felt that I was asking quite a bit already of the students to be creative and talking in class. So, what I settled on doing was to intersperse the audio Project with other more typical ESL language learning activities. In this case I decide to would intersperse the run of this Project with work on idioms.
Class 6 (Thursday, September 15)

- **Were the students “getting” the Project or the concept of a Proposal yet?**

In the class discussions, students began to discuss and make suggestions on each other’s ideas for Proposals. This let me know they were beginning to explore the potential of the Project for themselves. In today’s class, Hamdi suggested we do the first run of the Proposals together. Nhi asked whom she could use for a native speaker to compare her speaking to. James wanted to know if he could read a text and have someone answer questions about it. He had originally wanted to tape himself reading the text only, but realized that that would only work “half way”, as he put it, towards hearing himself speak.

- **How did students use the audio recorder?**

Using the brainstormed suggestions from class 2 and from class 5, I created 3 general categories of Methods that they could use in their Proposals.

Each student got to choose the category that most interested them, and I formed groups of students based around those choices. Nhi saw that the students might be able to use all three styles of recording. I agreed, but advised, for the first run, we keep it simple and choose only one.

1. Five students chose - Choose a text, make a recording of an American reading it, make a recording of you reading it, and compare the two.
2. Three students chose - Record your own voice and listen to that recording and decide what you want to work on
3. Two students chose - Record your voice and have a native speaker point out what they have a hard time understanding, and work on that.

- What ideas for form and student output were you now considering for the Project?

I prepared a list of what I thought were possible components for the project. I had hopes of eliciting student input on these steps, particularly, setting time frames and the sequence for the steps. Towards this end, I had created sets of strips of paper with the suggested steps. I had wanted to run a class activity of having the students, working in small groups, use the strips of paper to set sequence and discuss appropriate time allotments for each step.

The steps included:

- A weekly proposal of what I am working
- Small group discussion on the proposals
- Practicing new recording
- Recording
- Working on my issue (pronunciation, word order, etc.)
- Weekly journaling
- Small group discussion on journal
- Group feedback discussion

I hoped the activity would stimulate conversation, as well as draw them more deeply into the Project. Reading what was either resistance or confusion in the class, I backed away from that as a small group activity and decided to do it as a whole group. I drew a weekly time line on the board and we worked together placing the steps on that time line. In reviewing the recording of the class, even though I tried to
elicit their input, it was apparent I was really leading them through a sequence I thought would work.

**Observations on the Core Questions**

**motivation**

I made the judgment that the students I had weren’t prepared to create or didn’t have the enthusiasm to create many parts of the Project. I saw a spark of willingness and I decided to focus that spark more narrowly on them working, not on the overall design of the Project, but on the specifics of their recording and their Proposal.

**challenging the teacher**

It is clear to me now that I became uneasy with what I saw as too many unsettled areas in the Project. I needed to rein in the project and make my job more workable.

- **What did you settle on for student output?**

  Even though I would have preferred more input from the class, I made the decision to largely create the format for student output on my own. I realized, at the time, that I had confused some students earlier in the Project by my lack of clarity around the idea of a “proposal” and I decided the best way out of that confusion was that I define exactly what a proposal was.
I created a template for a proposal. I conceived it as weekly one-page sheet that students would use to report on what they were working on. I saw it as a starting place and hoped that students would be able contribute to its final form.

My original template contained these parts:

1. Speaking Priority (What I am working on.)
2. Method (How I am going to work on my Priority.)
3. What goals I will set.
4. How I am going to evaluate my progress.

The discussion in class on the template led me to narrow and more sharply define it. I wrote out the new steps on the board. Student homework for the weekend was to fit what they were working on into this new format.

Here’s how the template now looked:

1. Name, date, class, title of Project
2. Your speaking Priority
3. How you are going to work on it (Method)
   • Step 1
   • Step 2
   • Step 3
   • etc.

After class, I created a document, of the above steps, to serve as the formal template for future proposals. (See Attachment 04) I would hand it our in the next class after the weekend.

- Speaking Priority, Method, Proposal, Project what do they mean exactly?
It took a while for me to find words that could accurately describe the parts of this Project, because we were… exploring that. For example, I originally called what individuals were working on their “projects.” This created some confusion and probably that extends into this writing. When I first came up with the idea of a proposal as a way of documenting student work, I also started to use that interchangeably with project. If you were confused by this, you experienced what the students experienced. Nonetheless, over time the words did become clearer as the overall Project became clearer. Here is how I was using them at the time.

**Speaking Priority** – (later Focus) An aspect of the students speaking that they identified from a recording that they want to improve

**Method** – The steps they will take to work on their speaking Priority

**Proposal** – (also Action Proposal) The weekly written report detailing what they were going to work on and how (Speaking Priority and Method)

**Project.** – Describes the overall activity of the class using audio recording

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**Observations on the Core Questions**

**roles**

Sensing that the project was a bit unwieldy, I drew the lines between our roles even more sharply. I focused them on discovering how they could use the recording while I would be responsible for setting the calendar and the format for output.
The Beginning of Student-Generated Proposals

Class 7 (Tuesday, September 20)

- Where are you in the life and progress of the Project?

It was now time to find out if the Project would run under its own steam. The majority of the logistics of how the Project were now set, and the students’ efforts were focused on their individual Proposals. I had attempted to involve them in the logistics of the Project, but had, in the end, made the majority of the decisions myself. We would now, as a class, explore what was available in the form that we had created.

- How did students know what was now expected of them?

Over the weekend preceding this class, I created a preliminary calendar for the Project. I handed this out at the beginning of class 7. The calendar (See Attachment 03) detailed the expectations that I held for the progress of the Proposals. This calendar detailed what we had done over the last few classes and a few classes projected forward. This calendar would serve as a guide for the sequence of actions that were part of generating a new Proposal for each week.
What do you do in this class to help students develop a Method for their Proposals?

Before class, I made copies of the sample Method we had rather quickly created together towards the end of class six. At the beginning of today’s class I offer these to the students.

Insights

I often ask students if a handout of what we created in a previous class would be of help to them before I hand it out. Their response gives me a quick feedback on their state. Are they totally confused? What is their interest level? How much (more) support do they need?

It is very clear from their comments to the handout that they need more support in creating a Method for working on their Priority. I ask if it would be helpful to work through a few Proposals together. They agree.

I ask for a volunteer to describe his or her Proposal. It goes to Nhi. I ask her what her Priority is. “Pronunciation of the words.” I go to the board with chalk in hand and say, “Ok what is your first step?” “Listen to my recording,” she answers. “Next step?” I ask. “Listen to an American.” I ask for clarification. It becomes clear that she means listen to an American, in this case me, reading the same text. “Ok next step?” I ask again. “Identify the mistakes.” Immediately Hamdi interjects, “How are you going to find out the mistakes?”
I condense her thoughts and say while writing on the board “OK, so the next step is ‘Pick what you…’” Hamdi interjects again before I finish writing “What are you going to work on?” Nhi answers, “I am going to pick a word or more than one.” “How many words?” I ask. “All of them,” she answers.

The discussion continues with me trying, with the help of other students, to clarify and simplify Nhi’s Method for working on pronunciation. We spend about 10 minutes working on it as a group. In the spur of the moment, after all the steps are complete, I ask her to tell me how much time she will use for each step. This brings up another round of discussions as the class adds their opinions on how long she will need for each step. I see in our work that the process for creating a Method is becoming much more tangible and real.

**Observations on the Core Questions**

roles

My job became to narrow (or more rarely, broaden) what students attempted to do. Especially in this first solo run, I wanted students have a sense of success with their Proposals.
• Can you give another example of how you work on their Methods and other issues they are having at this time with their Proposals?

Radmilla volunteers to have the class help with her Method. Radmilla’s Priority is repeated words. I am not clear exactly what she means by that. It becomes clearer as we work together as a class.

I am again at the board writing what Radmilla tells us she has for a Method. Step 1 “listen to my recording” and Step 2 “figure out why I repeated the same words all the time.” There is a pause in the class as we look at that second step. Sahra submits that she has to find out what those words are first. I add that step to the board. I see that Radmilla’s step 2 is a very general step and I am looking for students to help create steps that are more specific but I appreciate the direction she is going and ask her for her next step. “What to do to change those words…those simple words into something more different…because I don’t know many words in English I use the simple words”.

Observations on the Core Questions

noticing

I was struck in particular how deeply and personally many of the students were able to find relevant and meaningful area to work on by simple examination of a recording of their speaking

Students have questions and make some suggestions for Radmilla. Radmilla bristles a bit and asserts that she can find new language that is more powerful and
precise by “…find a book and read some book… people who reading a lot of book can also enrich their language.” This sets off a firestorm of disagreement. I defend Radmilla’s position with “We can’t say no, it’s Radmilla’s Proposal.” Nhi comes back with “We are not saying ‘no’ we are saying ‘how?’”

**Insights**

I realized in the fray of the dispute that arose over Radmilla’s Method that the students are precisely where they need to be: engaging in finding a Method to address the Priority they chose. They are exploring the process of looking at their own learning. They are learning the difference between generality and specifics, about logical sequence. They are learning about constructive dialogue with others in an academic setting.

We continue to work on her Method as a group, trying to make it do-able. Towards the end, amidst the lingering doubts of other students about her Method, Radmilla gracefully restates the core of the whole Project and demonstrates a deep understanding of it. “It’s just a project, it’s just like some kind of tool that we have to experiment ourselves…. and we have different tools, thinking”. James agrees, saying that every body has the right to a Method that “he or she chooses. That is the Method she (Radmilla) likes to use.”

- **What did students decide to record for use in the Method of this first Proposal?**
In the previous class, students had chosen three general formats for generating their recording. In today’s class, I asked them to make that format more specific and prepare to make the recording.

The first group of students (James, Sahra, Hamdi, Nhi, Joyce) met and discussed what they would read for their recording. Their Methods centered on comparing a native speaker’s reading of a text with their reading of the same text. I asked them to agree on one text, so that the native speaker (in this case me) would only have to read one text for all of them instead of reading a different text for each student. For their reading, they settled on an excerpt of short novel named “It”, which one of the students was reading at the time.

The second group (Lila, Eva, Farhia) decided to create questions to answer. Each student was responsible for finding a question that they would like to be asked as well as helping other students practice responding to the questions each had created. Questions they had come up with included: Why don’t you like the idea of war? What do you think about raising the tax on cigarettes by one dollar?

The last group (Radmilla, Olesya) read from papers they had written, either from the writing class I was teaching or from another class. Olesya asked me to read the same sample of her writing and put that on her CD as well.
Observations on the Core Questions

motivation and interest

Olesya and Radmilla both chose to read some of their own writing as the source for a recording of their own voice. I tried to encourage any chance that came along to vest students more into the project via their own creativity.

• What were your plans for the upcoming class on Thursday?

In the Project calendar (See Attachment 03), I had set out time for working on their Methods in their Proposals in class on Thursdays. I wanted to be sure that students had something workable as a Proposal for the upcoming weekend as well as something that held meaning for them. The students were asked to take their Proposals home Tuesday night and to review the Methods in light of the work we did as a group, rework them as necessary, and have them ready to discuss in the next class on Thursday.

• Timeout, I am a little confused. Which recording for which Proposal?

Many students were also a bit confused at this time. This confusion, in part, was due to the fact that we were finding out what worked, and what to call it, as we went.

The first time we made a recording, back near the beginning of the course, I intended it only to cultivate student interest in their own speaking and to generate a
few general ideas of what to work on. It was made when I had no idea what route we
would take student recordings. The second recording was the one we would create
today and this would be used as part of the students’ first formal Proposal.

In the early days of the Project, I had loosely used the term proposals to
describe student-generated ideas on how to work on their speaking. In class six we
begun to standardized what a Proposal was. The first of this new formalized proposal
I called the First Proposal.

- **What did you do with the new recordings made in today’s class?**

  I did the same as I did with the recordings made back in Class 2. After class, I
took each of those recordings and put them on my computer. I then took the
recordings and burned them on a CD. For those students who were comparing their
reading to mine I burned that recording on their CDs as well
Class 8 (Thursday, September 22)

• How would students gage success or failure on their Proposals?

In class eight, I put the following question to the students. “Once you get through with your Method, what (will) you do next?” Students responded with these suggestions: “Talk about how you will improve.” “Did you improve?” “Whether you will change or make it better.” “Work on a new Proposal.” “Describe what you are going to do different.”

From these student suggestions came the final two parts for the template of the student Proposals. After class, I created an updated document from these new ideas (See Attachment 4a) to be handed it out in the following class.

The template for the Proposal was now as follows:

1. Project title, date, and student name.
2. The student’s speaking Priority.
3. Their Method for working on that Priority.

New added steps
4. An evaluation of whether the Method worked or not.
5. Changes to be made for the next Proposal.

• How do the students react to the idea of being responsible for step 4, determining how or whether their Proposals are working?

A number of students have questions about their Method and how to know if it is working and what changes to make. Isn’t that the teacher’s job, many seem to say. Joyce appears to understand, in part, by explaining a change she is going to make to her Method, to make it better. Still, she continues with the question “At the end, will you tell us if it works?” To which I reply, “No, you’re going to tell me.” A bit of silence follows.
Joyce adds, “How are we going to know if we keep making the same mistake over and over?”

To which Eva replies, “That, you can tell, if your issue is speed, you can time yourself”.

**Observations on the Core Questions**

**roles**

Upon Eva’s response I know I felt a shiver of excitement. I realized that I was no longer generating all the energy and direction on the project by myself. We had found a balance, finally.

A discussion ensues about whether students are able to tell what they need to work on or if they improved. The class is somewhat divided. Some pipe up that they can do it on their own while others disagree. James, for example, expresses that students (he) need “additional information … correction” and “feedback” to know whether their Method is working, and what changes to make on their speaking Priority.

I suggest to him that he add that he needs help to his Method. I further suggest that he can “use me or another native speaker but you need to put me that in your Method” I remind the students that I am already in some of their Methods, having read, recorded and put on their CDs an excerpt from the book “It” that would use for comparison to their own reading.
Observations on the Core Questions

roles

I placed myself in position for them to see me as a resource in their learning process. They started to see me as a means to reach their ends, via a means that they controlled.

- What were students required to do over the weekend and what homework was due for next week in class on Tuesday?

In class eight, I handed out the CDs containing the latest recordings made in the previous class. As mentioned above, some of the students’ Methods included comparing my speaking to theirs, so that recording is on those students’ CDs as well. Each student’s CD only has his or her recording on it (and mine if applicable.)

Students were required to work on two Proposals over each weekend. This was confusing to students at first. Students were required to “do” the Method detailed on Proposal number 1, which they had created and reviewed during the current week. The finals tasks for that first Proposal over the weekend were finishing Step 4 (Evaluating whether their Method worked) and Step 5 (Deciding what changes they would make to their next Proposal). Step 4 required a paragraph-length evaluation of their experience with their Method. Step 5 were the change(s) they would make for their next Proposal. From the decisions for changes they made in Step 5, students would create the initial 3 steps for the subsequent Proposal number 2.
What kind of changes could they make?

The Second Proposal that students would create over every weekend was a reflection of what they discovered upon completion of the Method in the preceding. Students would make changes to their Priority, the steps of their Method or what they would use for a recording based on what they learned from their First Proposal.
Class 9 (Tuesday, September 27)

• What happened in class following the first weekend for the formal Proposals?

I put this general question out to the students “So tell me about what happened this weekend?” There was a great deal of silence. I had to pull answers out of them. Finally, Sahra (a Somali) made the comment that in her recording she sounded like a British speaker. Farhia thought her new recording was clearer that the one we made back in the discovery stage. Olesya said she felt more comfortable, and that hers was clearer too. Radmilla, when asked, said she didn’t listen – but did her homework anyway. I wondered at the time how she could do her homework without listening to her tape but let it go.

James again wondered aloud whether his words were understandable to Americans. I asked how he would find out if they were or were not. His answer was that he would compare “my reading with yours.” Joyce told the class that she had changed her Priority from speed to pronunciation – particularly the pronunciation of long words.

• Any technical/logistical problems at this stage?

Lila told me again that she couldn’t get her CD to play. I surmised that the issue was connected to the audio file type. I decided that I would have to convert the recordings from a .wma file type to an mp3 if students didn’t have computers at home and only had CD players.

Joyce also reminded me that she had emailed me, in the days before the class, to say that I had omitted to add her recording to her CD. I had only put the recording
of my voice on there. I remember having a feeling of panic upon receiving her email, thinking “How could she do her Proposal without a recording of herself to work on?”

I restated the suggestion that I made to her at the time. I had asked her to think about what she could do with having only a recording of an American speaking. In other words, what could an ESL student do with a recording of an American as a way of looking at his or her own speaking?

**Thinking on the core questions**

*form vs. flexibility*

I’m sure this was a high order for Joyce. My hope was that this “problem” provided an opportunity for Joyce and other students to see the creative latitude of this Project, and offered them the freedom to delve as deeply as they were able, into the process of looking at their own speaking.

- **James stated that he needs help to know what words he doesn’t pronounce clearly.**

  *How do you work with that?*

  In class, Joyce reiterates James’ point saying, “I see like every word I pronounce is correct” (which is true for Joyce with her crisp British accent, but not for James). I reply, “So how are you going to…” She says, “I need someone else to point out the mistakes.” I add, in an encouraging tone, “So you need to find somebody (to help), that is could be part of your Method.”
I continue, “Some people, I think, can hear the mistakes they make or words that are hard to understand. And some people can’t. So, Joyce you are exactly right. You need someone to help you. That’s what this (Project) is about. Each week finding out what didn’t work (and making changes).”

I continue this conversation directed towards Joyce but using this discussion for the entire class as a way of illustrating how the self-evaluation component of the Proposal (step 4) works. I talk about how her observations could be fleshed out in the Method of her subsequent Proposal. I suggest the following step for her Method “Next week sit down with a native speaker or Joel and pick out a few things to work on”. But I advise her “to write the Method up that shows me how you are going to do that.”

I try to show the class the value in what she has discovered in her frustration “So, you learned something: You can’t find your own pronunciation problems.” Hamdi affirms this with a “yah.” Joyce reflects that when “you are speaking to someone you think you are speaking ok, but the listener…..” I pick up as she tails off, “So you need to find someone (to help).... so in your Method you write ‘I need to spend 10 minutes with an American to listening to my tape.’ and maybe this person can make a few notes about what is hard to understand.”

Upon reviewing the tape and re-experiencing that class, up to that point, I can feel Joyce’s frustration and confusion. Yet, even in the those moments, when all is darkness and you fear the whole class might be lost too, a student, in this case Eva, pipes up and says confidently, “I have that in my Proposal.” Calmly in a descending, reassuring tone, like I had it all way, I offer “Eva can show you.”
Class 10 (Thursday, September 29)

- **What kind of modeling do you do for student Proposals?**

  In the beginning of the class, I hand out a copy of my Proposal that I am doing along with them. (See Attachment 05.) It is in the same format as the Proposals they are working on. The Proposal details a Method for working on aspect of my singing. Students react positively to this. Radmilla looks it over, saying, “This is good”. I think most react to the clarity and the details of it. A discussion ensues about my singing. I give them a little sample. It is a little wobbly. We have a short discussion about my singing and my Proposal for working on it.

**Observations on the Core Questions**

  - **modeling**

    Modeling and risking failure of my own Proposal and Method placed me in their shoes. I intended it to lift the burden of “getting it right” and keep the exploration open.

- **Were you grading their Proposals?**

  The format of the Project evolved so that every Thursday would be a lab time to work on and problems or confusion surrounding their Proposals. At that time, I would review their Proposals for the upcoming weekend, and give a preliminary evaluation.
The Proposals received a “check” if I felt it was complete enough to work on, or an “i” (for incomplete) if it wasn’t. They could then use that time during class to make their Proposals stronger as necessary. When that was taken care of, they could start the work spelled out in their Proposal or leave, as they felt appropriate. The final grade for the Proposal came upon its completion.

- **How do you foster student support for each other in the classroom?**

  During class time, I ask Hamdi what her Focus is (by this time I had changed the title of Part 2 from Priority to Focus). She answers “Pronunciation.” I work with the class to see how this is a very general idea, similar to, “I want to improve my English.”

  I ask Hamdi for her Method so far. I write it, as she tells it to me, on the board in front of the class.

  1. Listen to my speaking, my recording
  2. Listen to Joel’s recording (of the same words)
  3. Find mistakes by comparing the two recording.
  4. Pick the words I have a hard time pronouncing
  5. Ask someone to help me pronounce them

  I put the question to the group, “How can Hamdi make this Method better?”

  Sahra, who may have been waiting all along for the chance to give advice to her friend, says that she could have the reading in front of her while she is listening and circle the words that she is wants to work on. I write this on the board. Nhi suggests in her fractured Vietnamese-American teenage-ese “She needs someone to, you
know, like, listen with her so that sometimes she so she can not figure out the mistakes but someone can, you know, like, listen at the same time and you know, like, they can compare.”

We work in this manner for about 15 minutes on Hamdi’s Proposal. I tease out problems and dead ends in her Method and direct questions to the group, such as:

What steps will she need to take? How can she do that? What’s next?

Students give many suggestions, such as, “Make notes on things you hear,” “Have Joel point out your mistakes.” I put those to Hamdi to see if she can use them. If she can, I ask her to restate them in a way that made sense to her and then write them on the board as part of “Hamdi’s Method.”

**Observations on the Core Questions**

**noticing**

Through group work on noticing what needs to be done for each other’s Proposals, students were developing skills for noticing on their own Proposals.

**roles**

Students were becoming designers/advisors/critics of each other’s methods in their Proposal.

**Insights**

The work of the group, as a whole on individual projects, was cultivating students confidence in developing logical approaches, critical thinking, and seeing each other as resources.
• What were some of the core issues that you worked with students?

Most of the time student difficulty with their Proposals centered on the following three areas: The first was that their Focus and/or Method was often very generally stated. The second was that they didn’t know how to find the part of their speaking they needed to work on. And third, even when they knew their focus, it was a challenge for them to tap into their learning experience and come up with creative ideas for their Methods to work on their focus.

• What other ways did you work to support student Proposals?

In the time following the whole class work, such as working with Hamdi’s Method described above, I spent time one-on-one with each of the students. I would give a quick reading of their Proposal, and if I felt it was workable, I would give them their latest CD, with their recording on it, and let them leave for the day. If their Proposals lacked coherence or focus, I would work with them.

In this class, I worked with Farhia and her Proposal. Her steps were aimed at making a good speech. Her steps involved introducing the topic well, and speaking slowly. I steered her toward noticing what she does in natural speaking and redirected her to focus on problems that occur with that.

I also worked with Radmilla. Radmilla had been at the center of the storm a few classes back over the argument of whether she could improve her speaking, in this case improve and expand her choice of words, by reading books. In the spirit of the Project, I had encouraged her to explore this. She told me, on this day, that she wanted to make a change. She explained the new angle for her Method “I wanted to find those
words that I have a problem with ... and to record those words and after to do the same thing
with you (in other words, have me make a recording of those same words).” I told her,
without reference to her earlier position, that idea sounded good. We set up a time to
do that in the next class.

Next, I talked with Nhi and found her Proposal very complete and detailed. It
included a self-evaluation using a follow-up recording of the same reading. I liked the
idea of it but that the current sequence of our recording and Proposal cycle made that
difficult. I thanked her for the idea but said that simpler was better, especially for me,
in this first run of the Project. She ended up doing it her way anyway.

Joyce brought up again the difficulty in finding things she needed to work on
in her speaking. As mentioned above, she has a crisp British African colonial accent.
Yet, there would be times in class where I could not understand what she had said. So
I knew there was something to work with. But the main issue for her was finding
those words. So we talked again, as I had done in the previous class, about getting
another person, a native speaker, in this case me, to work with her. I asked her to make
that specific in her Method and to detail precisely how this native speaker was to be of
use to her.

The last student I met with that day was Eva. Eva always seemed to be right on
target with what the Project was about. She also had one major asset available that
other students didn’t. She was married to an American. This solved one of the major
blocks that many of the students with their Proposals, how to work on what they
noticed about their speech. But even beyond that, her Proposals were very detailed
and well thought out, and she often served as a resource to others.
Observations on the Core Questions

challenging the teacher

I ran way past the end of the class time. I thought it important to make sure that students had a good idea of what they were working on for the weekend. But the thought crossed my mind. How would I do this with 20 students? As an adjunct teacher with no paid-for office hours, benefits, etc. why was I sinking this much time in the Project?

Observations on the Core questions

form and flexibility

I now felt that strengthening student self-observation, and organized, critical thinking were the most important aspects of what this particular iteration of Exploratory Learning had to offer. With this narrowing, I hoped to preserve a sense of success and an allow student to maintain a sense of exploration. Other classes, with other situations would point to different narrowing.
Class 11 (Tuesday, October 4)

• What was the student attitude in the classroom toward the Project?

Some days the classroom can be a very dull and airless place. That is how it felt on this day. When I asked students if they were having any problems, I had to ask them individually by name, none volunteered. My mind raced at the time wondering if they had decided not to do the Project at all, or if they were bored, or worse, hostile, to the complexity and responsibility that I was asking of them.

Nobody had any problems or comments. I pushed on to asking if anyone had to make any change, such as, a new recording. Again, I had to ask one by one. Some needed to, others were going to use the same recording. There was no enthusiasm. I was pulling teeth.

• That sounds kind of dismal. Any chance for a happy ending?

One of the last students I ask, as to whether they needed to make a new recording, is Nhi. The previous week, in one-on-one work with her, I was somewhat confused and somewhat resistant to the complexity of her Proposal. Once again, she was going to take the Project deeper than I expected.

The conversation starts with her answering, “I need people to help me.” To which I say, “What kind of help do you need?” She replies, “… like discuss the group, like two or three people, so that it is interesting about my topic, you know like sit together and we talk.”

I ask for volunteers and students are a bit wary wanting to know what she wants to talk about. Her topic is coping with stress. She gives a few examples of coping with stress; talking with friends, exercising. I am privately ecstatic that she is
really taking hold of the idea of the Project and is exploring how to make it work.

Olesya and James quickly volunteer to help. Joyce asks, “Who is going to do the talking you or…” Nhi responds “No, we do it together, you know, like, I already list some ideas I gonna’ say... I just give some idea and you just get back to me, you know like what you thinking about, your opinions and I tell my opinion too.”

**Insights**

One of the greatest challenges in working on this type of project is hanging in there when students seem bored or resistant. I hold on to the belief that beneath the surfaces, students are incubating some great ideas and they just need a chance to get them out.
Class 12 (Thursday, October 6)

• How and when did you decide to end the Project?

The original layout for the 16-week semester was to have three major undertakings. The brand new Digital Recorder Project you are reading about, a service learning project and a process debate. That would break the semester roughly into thirds. By class 12 (out of a total of 32) we had already had completed more than a third of the classes.

In this class, I announced that we would do one more round of Proposals. I wanted to do one more because at the time I saw that most students had conquered the logistics of the Project and could focus more on the Methods in their Proposal. The next Proposal, to be created new, this weekend would be our fourth. Thus, students had to finish their third over the upcoming weekend and create the fourth and final one. I also announced that we would be doing some feedback on the Project following the last Proposal.

• What were you doing at this stage of the process on Thursdays?

Thursday settled into the form of an open lab. By that, I mean after I took care of Project details, such as; handing back their latest recordings on CD, reviewing their Proposals and answering questions they had. After that, students were free to use their time as they wished.
On this Thursday, when I am working with students, I see that there is still some confusion about what is to be worked for the upcoming weekend and due next Tuesday. Seeking to address this, I go to the board. I draw large chalk diagrams of the Proposals 3 and 4. Pointing to Proposal 3, I clarify the evaluation part (step 4). “When (the step says) ‘What worked or want didn’t’, what is it talking about?” Ever reliable Hamdi answers “the Method.” Bolstered by this affirmation I ask about step 5. “And what does ‘changes’ in step 5 refer to?” This time I get the range of accurate responses; “The Method,” “The recording,” The Focus.”

**Observations on the Core Questions**

**modeling**

I knew I had modeled the proposal enough when the students could describe it for each other.

• **Any good examples of student frustration and resistance?**

Lila brings me back to earth with “But how do you answer the Method do you re-record or listen to it again?” I am not sure what she is asking. The tape recorder, which is nearer to her than to me, picks up her saying under her breath in dramatic exasperation “The man (referring to me) is like, oh my god...” I continue “over the weekend you run through your Method and...” She cuts me off with, “I am not good at making stuff up!” I counter, “It is more like...” She cuts me off again insisting, “It’s making stuff up!” I persist that, “this is the tricky (difficult) part, but if you decide that your Method didn’t work
for unnecessary words, (her focus was on using the words ‘like’ and ‘you know’ and ‘um’) then you need to come up with a new Method.” She mutters a few things and uneasy truce is somehow established.

Observations on the Core Questions

challenging the teacher

I had to take care that I did not get too attached to students having powerful learning experiences. Some didn’t.

• How were students using you as a resource?

After reviewing their Proposals and reviewing the homework, I dismissed the class except for those who had me in their Methods and wanted to work together. James, for example, had extracted 10 words or so from his latest recording, and we worked on those. All told three or four students stayed around and we worked mainly on pronunciation issues that they were working on from their Proposals.

• What became of your Proposal (of your singing) that you were doing in parallel with the students and their speaking Proposals?

I did one more recording of my singing in this class. I sang Cole Porter’s “Just One Of Those Things” in front of the whole group. At the time, I felt nervous doing it. Listening to the recording, it was a little scratchy, but fairly strong and on key.
I wasn’t actively working on the Method that I created for my Proposal, as I had originally announced to the class. But I wanted to at least work through one cycle of the Proposal as a model for them. So, this was a bit of insincerity on my part, but I had made the decision to allocate my time towards managing the Project instead of actually doing my particular Proposal.

We discussed the song after I sang it. There are some interesting uses of the language in the song and a few idioms as well. We had an active opinionated discussion about the meaning of the song, as well as connecting our lives to the phrases “painting the town,” “a trip to the moon” and the subtle difference between “an affair” and “a love affair.”
Class 13 (Tuesday October 11)

• **How do you do feedback?**

After I warm the students up to the value of feedback, I put this request to the students, “Come up with some questions for you to give me feedback about the Project, in other words, come up with some good questions that you would like me to ask you.” As is typical of my feedback process the wording is a bit difficult – creating questions that you (the student) would like me to ask you about what you thought about the Project. It often starts slow. This time is different. When I ask for questions, Hamdi offers, “How did you like the Project?” I move to the board and write this question down as an example. The class rumbles a bit and Hamdi addresses someone’s confusion with “[These are questions] he is going to ask us!”

I next direct students to work in pairs and restate the task, “2 or 3 good question that you would like to be asked... about the Project... What you liked about the Project or how you would change it.”
Observations on the Core Questions

roles

Student feedback was one of the cornerstones of this Project. The feedback work gave sense of closure and a means to improve the process for the next run. Its greater value for me, however, lay in presenting an opportunity to let students take on the role of observer. They became observers of their own learning and their participation in that learning.

- What do they come up with for feedback questions?

After working in pairs for about 10 minutes, I open the floor with this, "What questions do you want to be asked about this Project ... that would help you give your opinion about it ... What question would ... ask you ... to give that opinion?"

James, understandably, asks for clarification. "So we have to ask questions which we are back from..." I finish his sentence with "You are going to get them back from me, right" James says "ok." Eva supports it with "He's going to ask us. He wants our opinion."

We work for about 20 minutes creating probing questions. Students are very engaged in the process. Some student frustration with the project comes out through their questions. A bit of unease arises in the class, as other students who had more success with the project don’t understand questions they see as negative.
The brainstorm continues for a few more minutes until the board is filled with questions. I add to the board the initials of the author of the question next to the question and draw the brainstorm to a close. (See Attachment 06 for a complete list of the questions)

**Insights**

This technique of having them create the questions improves the quality of the response for my learning about the process. Instead of having students give generic answers to generic questions I find they feel a certain responsibility to expressing themselves more clearly and with interest if they are answering their own most pressing questions.

• **Now that you had all the student-created feedback questions, what do you do with them?**

I clarify that the students won’t have to answer all of them. “There may be some that I really want you to answer, but I’ll give you a choice of the other ones.” “We can choose.” Lila asserts. To which I respond, “I want you to answer the ones that are important to you. [For example] if the embarrassment [question] is not important to you then I wouldn’t want you to answer that.”

I let students go assigning no homework for that night connected with the feedback questions. I want a chance to look over the questions and create a sheet of the assembled question to hand out to students at the next class meeting.
I often write what students say raw and unedited on the board. I let them look at it and, working as a class or from their own initiation, we edit and clarify what they wanted to say. I want to validate the process of their ideas first before working on the particulars of it.
Class 14 (Thursday October 13)

- **What do you do with the feedback questions they created?**

  After we finish up some details about their final Proposal and recordings, I hand out the document (See Attachment 06) containing the feedback questions they created in the previous class.

  I ask students to take two or three minutes to skim and think about the questions. I tell them that next we will then split off into pairs to share reactions. I model with the class possible answers to the first group of questions. I encourage them to make a few notes while skimming the questions, because tonight for homework they will be asked to write a few sentences on each group of questions.

  While the students read the questions and make notes, I do the same. I finish in about 5 minutes and hand my responses to Radmilla who is also finished. She seems surprised by my answer to the first question “Did I do my Method or did I just write it down?” My response was I just wrote it down. I wonder what she is thinking.

  When most are done, I ask students to pair up and I instruct students to have one of the partners talk on the each question for 30 seconds then switch roles. I act as timer and we work our way through all the questions in this way.

### Observations on the Core Questions

**modeling**

Within the constraints of time and professional boundaries, I try to do what I ask of the students and be as honest as I would like them to be.


**Insights**

This exercise, where students had to quickly explain to another student what their opinion was, helped students develop clarity and depth around their own thinking and served to help develop their ideas for the follow-up writing assignment on the questions.

- **How do you encourage quality in their responses to the feedback questions?**

  While the discussions are proceeding, I grab some samples of what I overhear and write those on the board. When the discussions are finished, I move to the sentences I wrote on the board. “Look” I say, “at these (sentences) on the board. These are some things I heard people saying … ‘I liked the recording.’ ‘It was too hard.’ ‘The Project was interesting.’ ‘I didn’t understand.’” After a pause I ask, “If I am reading these sentences…. what’s the problem if I am trying to get information?” Quickly, and to my surprise, Eva comes back with, “You need the reason why.” I write that on the board. Working on this for a few minutes, students are able to contribute that these responses lack “details” and “specifics” which I write on the board. I focus the class on the comment “I didn’t understand.” I ask the class on how to make that question more useful.

  Joyce volunteers, “[You need to know] why you didn’t understand.” I want to continue this line of thinking and say, “Ok and what else?” Lila responds quickly with, “[You need to say you] didn’t understand what.” “Yes,” I say, concurring with her, “an example.”
**Insights**

I think immediate development of criteria by using anonymous selections of student work helps students because the subject matter is directly and immediately connected to what they are thinking about and reflects the patterns of how they are capable of responding at that moment.

• *Is the feedback process the last thing for that day?*

I close out the brainstorm session and add a reminder that the final Proposal, and feedback are due next class on the Tuesday after the weekend. The room grumbles. Questions arise about how much to write in answering the questions. They get my typical answer on this, “*Enough to make me understand [what you need to say].*” Continuing I add, “*If you didn’t like the Project, I am ready to hear that. I am not going to give you an “i” (incomplete) because you hated it. Or you felt it was a waste of time.*” Eva supports my point, saying, “*You want why, you want why the reason.*”
What do you do in the final class for the Project?

I decide to have a discussion about what they wrote at home on the feedback questions. Sahra starts the discussion off, “I liked the Project in the first place when we first started... When we went deep down in it and I found out my weakness...oh (a dramatic sigh).” I probe, “Sahra why did you like the Project initially?” Sahra pulling back, “Cause at first I thought the Project was easy.” To this, I laugh. She continues, “But as we got deeper I found some of my weakness. [For example,] I couldn’t pronounce words with “r” in it.

James and Eva talk about how the Project was challenging. Eva describes it this way. “You tell us to find a way... how we think... instead in Europe we just open the book and we study.... and here it is creativity... you have to think.” She saw the Project’s value for her, but wonders whether it is real learning. Others in the class agree.

Observations on the Core Questions

for the future

Was it “real” learning? How do I better connect this learning with learning styles they have experienced in the past?

You encouraged negative feedback in the previous class. Do you get any?

I knew that Lila was the most discontented with the Project almost from the beginning. Towards the end of the Project, when she expressed frustration with it, I told her that I valued her opinion on what happened for her during the Project.
In class, she expresses the opinion that creating the Methods in the Proposal was “A big problem.” I push for specifics. She responds, “I felt like one Proposal was good enough and I had to for the next assignment ‘make up’ another one...and making it up [felt] like lying” She also expresses embarrassment that others seemed to be “getting” the Project, saying, “Everybody [else] knew what they were doing and stuff” (See Examples of Student Works in the Appendix for Lila’s and other students’ feedback.)

**Insights**

I seek out reactions, even negative ones, as a way of engaging students in their learning process. It adds to the depth of students’ learning experience to explore and explain their resistance as well as their enthusiasm.

• What were some other opinions on the Project?

When I asked about the flexibility of the Project, students came down on both sides of the issue. Some felt the need for more guidance. Others like Radmilla had this response “because people (don’t) know (our) speaking issues.... it is better... for us to decide (how) to work on our Method and focus on our problem... to choose to work on the problem that we might think that we have.”
• Do they touch on where they needed more support in the Project?

When I put this question to the class, Hamdi and Sahra simultaneously say “The Method.” Hamdi continues on her own, “How to do it step by step. The first week when you explain … I couldn’t understand it.” I probe with, “Was the example I gave you about my singing helpful?” Hamdi responds, “No it was on the board that first time [when I got it].”

I believe she is referring to the time in class 7, or perhaps class 10, when I worked out a few Methods choosing one student’s focus and using the class as an aid in developing the Methods. Radmilla continues this line with, “I was confusing in the beginning because I didn’t know how to…like what to do in the Method…. like how to make a…. am I supposed to make sentence so specific.”

I agree that the Project could have been clearer, but share with them my side of the exploration. I explain that because it was the first time through I needed their help and ideas, saying “I didn’t want to give you too much information on how to do something because I saw many good ideas come up on how to do it.” I give the example how Nhi came up with at Method that created a whole new possibility for the Project.

• Any adventures in their responses?

At times, the discussion becomes confusing. I try to start a discussion around the fact that there were no goals in the class. I turn to Nhi and I am very confused by her response. She seems to be contradicting what I thought was her earlier opinion that the Project was too long and not that helpful. She starts talking about
pronunciation. The conversation spins down into a whirlpool of misunderstanding.

My attempts at clarifying her ideas launch her off in a new tangent.

**Insights**

Coming from educational cultures of pleasing the teacher, I could see a few students were challenged by the opportunity to criticize their teacher and to examine their learning experience.

James rescues the discussion. Although initially, I fear he is leading us into a deeper crevasse. He begins to talk about pronunciation too, and recounts his experience at another ESL programs in the area. “[At the] University of Southern Maine there’s a list for words and their pronunciation. But here it is open... it is an open program. You have to find your way yourself…”

He slowly begins to gather the words, which for me, express the essence of the Project, “I choose to practice some words that sound difficult to me to pronounce. ....It was a problem [to learn how] to practice them and to seek help from someone who is a native speaker like you… but it worked. And also, it makes me creative in thinking of how to get with my problems. This was the best part of this Project…because it make me to be responsible.”
CHAPTER 5
CONCLUSION

Noticing

Noticing is the nucleating point around which the whole energy of Exploratory Learning is released. From the first instance of a Project, students realize they are being put in the position to discover something about themselves. A natural curiosity and energy surround that discovery.

Noticing, placed in a position of importance, moves the balance of power in the classroom from the teacher towards the student. It creates feelings of amusement and curiosity but it can also be deeply stirring. I place a great deal of trust in what students are able to notice about themselves.

This class working as a group came up with many noticings. (See class 5 for a list.) And in the following weeks, students saw what others were noticing and started to notice that about themselves. For most students there was no shortage of what to work on.

One of the challenges of using noticing in the classroom is connecting that to the requirements of the context. My class was a listening/speaking class. So, when I was conceiving the Project there seemed to me a natural connection between using a digital recorder and having students somehow employ that. How to utilize noticing in
other iterations of an Exploratory Learning Project is a key starting point to any project. Since this has always been an interest of mine, ideas come quite naturally. I could see how it would be useful to discuss it with colleagues. The questions might be framed like this: What situations, what technology, what games would allow students to see what they most needed to work on? From that point a Project will come.

Are there downsides to using students’ ability to notice? Occasional unwieldiness. I have explored it mainly in class sizes of less than twenty. In class sizes over ten I have often had to categorize what students noticed. I do it with their permission. Often they are happy to be working with someone else on a similar idea.

Noticing customizes the curriculum. Within my class, I had students whose lack of English pronunciation skills made them very difficult to understand. I also had students whose street language competence is of the highest level but may have difficulty understanding the usage guidelines surrounding words such as “like” and “dude.” This range makes any textbook or fixed curriculum too narrow for the benefit of all. Noticing, as a starting point, gives the teacher the flexibility to help students to discover what their communications needs are.
Flexibility vs. Form

There arises in this way of teaching a weighing between form and flexibility. Often they are opposites. Too much pre-determined form can stifle creativity and student initiative. Too much flexibility can have the students feeling cast out into the wilderness.

In the balance between flexibility vs. form, there comes times when the teacher may feel the need to reduce flexibility to create form. In this run of Exploratory Learning, by class 6 I had taken over a great deal of the overall design of the Project. At the time, it felt a bit heavy-handed on my part. I wanted to keep more control of the design in students’ hands. But I was guided by the sense that the students were at the edge of their comfort of being in charge of their learning. And I believe that my action eased their minds and gave them more clarity about how they could work and succeed within the Project.

I came to this decision by weighing of what was workable, what would maintain student interest, and what would get us closer to the requirements of the context. In Exploratory Learning, there is no pre-set pattern for how this is determined.

This process of not knowing the endpoint, or not having a stated curriculum or textbook, is a challenging path for some students. I had to repeat many times, to student questions, that there is no textbook for the class, that we were creating the material for this class. This “no textbook” class, in a college context, struck some
students as odd. For others it seemed downright unsettling, as they came to realize that some of the tools they had used to be successful students in the past, were not going to be part of this class.

In the end, finding this balance of form and flexibility, is part of the exploration. I believe investing students in that solution is one of the most powerful motivators for students to find out what is possible in learning. It holds the risk of failure. But there is no time wasted, if the students are able to turn back towards examining the questions; How well did we explore the ideas we created? What would have worked better?

**Roles**

Project-based learning requires students to move out of their chairs and become more than mere vessels of received information. They become investigators, designers, teachers, and presenters. These roles break the glass wall between information and learning, teaching students how to acquire information and make it useful. These roles require creativity, planning, and organization - all traits necessary and beneficial to the development of a flexible and powerful mind.

Exploratory Learning pushes this change in roles even further. Students are asked to explore what it is they need to know. They are brought into the process of how to best support their classmates and themselves in that exploration. They are invited into the logistics of the Project itself, participating in decisions concerning; scheduling, goals, output, uses of the class time and evaluation.
An excerpt from my journal 9/16/2005

“Something that I continue to mention to the students as the Project progresses is that they are to see themselves in this Project from two perspectives at the same time. They are both Participant and Designer. Designing what they think would work to improve an ESL students speaking as well as participating in that by testing their ideas on themselves.”

So what is the teacher doing? The teacher’s first and primary role is to decide around what idea or format the Project will take place. It is a set of questions that a teacher asks of himself or herself: What expectations does the context have for the students? What combination of skills, knowledge, and personal traits do students need to reach those? Which type of Project, experiences or equipment is most likely to bring that about?

The above paragraph is perhaps a set of questions that any teacher regardless of class format might ask. However, with Exploratory Learning the teacher houses these questions within, “How will the students be able to do this for themselves?”

Here’s an excerpt from my teaching journal 3 weeks into the Project that reveals the discussion I was having with myself about my role as a teacher.

“My job, as I see it, is to set a general direction where the Project is going, and bring form to it as we pass through the stages. This includes: Guiding students to come up with valid things they want, need to work on. Insuring they have the means to work on those things. Designing and negotiating with them how to do those things. Coming up with ways with
them to document their progress. Negotiating a time schedule and a sequence of stages. Keeping them connected to the overall design of the Project as well as their progress within it. Working out adjustments as necessary. Coming up with criteria for evaluating themselves and the process and Project.”

One responsibility of the teacher that I want to emphasize from the above is “bring form to it (the Project) as we pass through the stages.” Exploratory Learning heads off into a vague unknown. Bringing back to the class things such as calendars, prototypes, and outlines of decisions and directions give students a greater sense of the overall process in which they find themselves. These documents, acting like the minutes of a meeting, condense and clarify decisions made. They give a stabilizing sense of the Project to the student, recording what road we have built already and outlining the general direction where the new road will be built.

Another role of the teacher is to be sure that what the students are embarking on is do-able. For example, early on in this Project I abandoned the idea making a follow up recording after the students had completed the Method they created. I never brought it up as an option to the students. That narrowing as well as removing most of the logistics was not what I originally imagined how the Project might work. Over the course of the first half of the Project, I circled the wagons around student self-awareness and critical thinking. Making improvements to a student’s speaking ability, one of the original ideas, became incidental to the overall new direction of the Project.

The many roles of the teacher evolve and blend throughout the life of the Project. That evolution starts with Visionary of what could be, moves to Inspirer of
students to the potential of the Project, picks up Advisor on how students could be a successful part of the Project, moves on to Recorder of decisions made, takes on Facilitator of group work, becomes Resource for the development of ideas, and the throughout the run of the Project, a Coach finding what students are capable of and supporting them to find what motivates them and helping them explore that.

Both teacher and student share responsibility with the Project in one area in particular, evaluating the Project’s effect and effectiveness. They both do this in Exploratory Learning by addressing these questions: What did it do for us and for others? How well/easily/efficiently did it do/achieve those things? How much effort/enthusiasm did we put into it? What would we do things differently next time?

A very useful tool for empowering students in their new role is the method of feedback used in this class, described in classes 13 through 15. In it, I ask students to create the questions they want to be asked about their experience in the Project. This responsibility of creating the questions is often challenging for students. This first requires them to explore their own reactions to the Project. Following that I ask students to turn around and create a question that allows them to express those reactions. I believe this heightens their awareness of their reactions and places them in control of what they want to say. The aim is to have them create the questions that allow them to say what is most important to them. It is a way for them to explore their learning, their process, finding what works and what doesn’t.
Modeling

My tendency is to under model. I lean towards letting students struggle a bit, trusting them to explore their ideas of what could be. I intentionally put many tasks out to them without much preparation. I see students as resources and attempt to use their knowledge about learning to help shape the Project.

I also hold a concern that modeling, in some cases, takes away student creativity at the most fundamental level. I want to see what they can create without the prejudice of seeing previous work. An illustration of this issue came in class 10 when I wrote out the Method for Hamdi’s Proposal on the board. James piped in that “This is same as I did because we have the same problem.” This is not surprising, as we had modeled an example pronunciation Method on the board in a previous class.

To me this illustrates that James did not think about working with his speaking challenges creatively. How much to model comes down to what the aim of the learning is. In this case, the following are the types of questions I asked myself were: Was I looking for James to have a successful experience following the steps of a Method created for someone else? Or, was I more interested in what he would come up with from exploring how he learns and developing a Method around that?

With this Project, I placed an emphasis on having students look for and think about addressing their own speaking problems before they get assistance from me. More than a few believed they couldn’t do it. In an Exploratory Learning project, I
have found that holding students in that initial confusion create deeper and more lasting learning for the students.

However, I also see the limits of this line of thinking. There were moments in the Project where students had no idea what I was pointing to. My early requests to come up with ideas on how to use a video recorder were done with little preparation of the students. I believe some students drifted over the line from confusion into indifference and that created more work on my part to re-connect them to the project.

So how much to model, is also part of the exploration. My main focus is to keep that exploration open. With each new run of an Exploratory Learning Project, I am looking for the balance point between too much and too little modeling. I offer no concrete resolution to this, except to hold these questions in mind; Does the modeling I do support or take away from the goal of the Project? How can I change the modeling to give more support for the creation of student ideas and initiative?

There is a form of modeling with which I have fewer questions; participation as a student in the Project with the students. Doing what the students are being asked to do, models one of the main ideas behind my style of teaching, that we are exploring this Project together. I try to do this in all my classes, be it an in-class writing assignment, or answering class feedback questions or in the case of this Project creating a Proposal to work on my singing.

I participate in what they are doing, for two reasons. I think this idea of doing in parallel, also lends a feeling of authenticity to a project or assignment that the students are working on. Secondly, I think that students who are struggling to find their way in learning can come to resent doing something that a teacher thinks is
“good for them.” I believe my working on what they are working on helps keep students from relating to learning, not as something that they are doing for the teacher in order to pass the class, but as something useful for themselves.

In the beginning of this paper I said my greatest concern would be stimulating

**Motivation / Initiative**

and maintaining student interest. There were many times during the semester where students were quiet and passive in the classroom. (See Class 11) There were also times when they were highly engaged. (See Class 7)

The high energy times in the classroom were around the initial noticing of how they sounded, working in groups creating their recordings, working together as a group on one individual’s Proposal and discussing in pairs their feedback ideas.

The low energy times generally were when I came to them cold with suggestions “to come up with ideas” as we were creating the form of the Project. In review of the paper, I can see these efforts were often unsuccessful. I don’t believe it’s from a lack of student capacity but more from my lack of warming them up and connecting them to the meaning behind the form I was asking for. I was coming at them out of the blue.
In retrospect, I needed to help students to find a way to feel more vested in the Project. I needed to find a way help them ask themselves, “How can we make this Project work and be fun?” Conceiving the Project was fun for me. How do I transfer that enthusiasm to the students?

Challenging the teacher

I have a confession to make. I want all students to “get” what the Project is about and have fun doing it. That doesn’t always happen. As a teacher, I am still learning to take partial successes and build on those. I have to remember that not all students are ready to take on the student-based learning.

My desire for the Project to succeed and for the students to have fun, can overshadow a basic premise of Exploratory Learning. It’s an exploration for me too. The desire for success helps me focus, but a danger lies in placing too much value on results and thereby holds my sense of myself as a teacher on the outcome.

This style of teaching, though I find it exciting does put me at my edge. Excerpts from my journal point to some rather dark moments. In one entry, I wonder to myself whether I will continue teaching or not. In the following entry, written after the Project was completed, I question the whole premise of how I teach.

“… sometimes in ESL I think we (I) take on too much of the students’ responsibility. That I am in there micromanaging their intellectual development. Is (Exploratory Learning) getting them closer
to the academic discipline they will need (for success in other college classes)?”

The open nature of Exploratory Learning can push my buttons. The above excerpt points to some deep inner questioning. Looking back on this issue, I see clearly how I would have benefited from having more collegial support. I needed to let off the steam and keep perspective on my expectations. As detailed in the Introduction, there was very little available at the college. I used what I had, from SIT and my previous context, but in retrospect, it was not enough.

**For the future**

Reviewing the Audio Recorder Project provided me many insights for improvement. The first change would be to have the students first experience themselves on an audio recording, before they ever were asked to think about what to do with it. I would put the power of noticing right up front, and use that reactive energy to generate the initial form of the Project. From that place, I can see students being more engaged in finding what issues they had and how the format of audio recording could be of use to them.

Another area of change concerns my feedback on work done by the students. The transcript below came from a one-on-one discussion with Eva about her Proposal. The class recording captures what changes I would make to improve the Project.
“… give students better feedback on their Methods and work more directly with them… and make specific comments. But because it was the first time through.. I was very busy making sure that the Project was set up so people would know what step to do.”

Also, from that session came the idea of integrating the Project into other college classes that the students were taking at the same time. In Eva’s case, we included in her Method selecting and working on 10 words from her Psychology class. I encouraged her to be very specific in how she was going to work on those words.

“Well I’d like (to see) all those details. Because when I show it to other people... I can say this is how Eva did it. She did this and this and this.”

Another area for future development of the Project, which was removed during this run, was student self-evaluation of their progress on the Focus of their Proposal. However, as mentioned above, one student, Nhi, incorporated it into her Proposal on her own. I initially tried to steer her away from that idea due to concerns of time and complexity. But as I came to see what she was doing and the insight she had into the Project, I let her go ahead.

The largest overarching change that I would bring to a first run of a Project would be to have lower expectations around what students should be able to do concerning the overall design of the Project – dates, sequence, output, etc and to place more emphasis on the design of the Proposals. If the class was going to do a second
run, then I believe the students could be more productively involved in designing the logistics of the Project.

During the Project, we came up with ideas for the next run. One of my ideas was to start the whole Project with an audio recording of an ESL student from outside the classroom. From that recording, we as a group could come up with ideas on how and what to listen for. Students would then have developed practical, critical listening skills before they started working with their own tapes. Further we could as a group, use the recording to work through all the steps together that would make a Project useful.

In the run of any project, students can be counted on to generate new ideas. For example, in class 6, Hamdi suggested that we do the first Proposal together. Later in that same class, James wanted to generate the material for his recording by reading a text for content and have someone ask him questions about it.

The above are ideas on particulars associated with running a Project. But during this Project I also found myself returning, on occasion, to a bigger, ongoing question that I hold about my teaching. What follows is an excerpt from my class journal on this question.

“One of the soft underbellies of student-directed learning is the unanswered question as to whether students learn the language any faster. Maybe part of the reason that this is difficult to assess is that most testing only measures output. It is much more difficult to measure changes in student capacity for learning. How could you test that a student is gaining skills and ability as an independent self-directed learner? How can we demonstrate that benefit of student directed
learning to the teacher and student as well as potential employers or admission departments of higher education?”

**Summary Comments**

In writing this paper I endeavored to have you, the reader, experience this process I created called Exploratory Learning. I initially felt the paper’s greatest impact for you would be if you could enter it as an open-ended exploration. I was resistant to creating hard and fast rules about how to do a Project or what you should expect as a result. My advisor on this project, Paul Levasseur, gently eased me away from that ideal.

I believe the paper is more approachable because of his advice. And his counsel also serves as a useful metaphor about the limits of Exploratory Learning itself. While Exploratory Learning points to many worthwhile goals for the classroom, our job as teachers is to connect with the students in front of us and ease our ideals back towards what will most benefit them.

Good luck on your teaching explorations. I hope my exploration of learning was useful to you.
Appendix

Selected Classroom Handouts

Attachment 01  Handout of summation of early class work
Attachment 02  Handout attempt at creating a sequence of steps for the Project
Attachment 03  Calendar of what was done and ideas for moving ahead
Attachment 04  Early Proposal template
Attachment 04 a Final Proposal template
Attachment 05  Teacher Proposal example
Attachment 06  Sheet listing class generated feedback questions for Project

Project Timeline

Selected Samples of Student Work
The Video Project
ESL-097 Listening and Speaking
Fall 2005

Stage One

class question (9/1/2005)
How could we use video to improve English speaking?

class suggestions
• we could ask questions each other and we could record the answers (Joyce)
• record ourselves and play back – and listen to yourself (James and Farhia)
• teacher records words that students don’t know how to pronounce – especially words that are pronounced differently than they are spelled - (James and Farhia)
• have two separate groups – non-native and native speakers – and we could have the same discussion - say about everyday news – we could see how the Americans used different words and expressions (Eva and Radmilla)
• Or we could ask the students and the teacher (a native speaker) the same questions and compare how we answer those questions. (Joel)
• having native speakers and us read just one sentence at a time and so we could compare they way you pronounce (James and Farhia)

class question (9/1/2005)
What could talk about for 3 minutes for a recording?

class suggestions
• what goals do you have for the future (in this class)?
• why education is so important?
• what do like to do in your free time?
• what is your favorite holiday and how does your family celebrate that?
• who is the most influential person in your life and why?
• where would you rather live in the city or country and why?
• what do you think about the war in Iraq?
The Audio Project
ESL-097
Advanced Listening and Speaking
9/13/2005

stage one questions – (thinking about the project)
  • What have you found helpful in the past in improving your speaking of
    English?
  • What are your main difficulties in speaking English?
  • How can we use video to improve our English Speaking?

stage two questions (first ideas about how the project will look)
  • what can we talk about
  • how long should we talk for a good sample of speaking

stage 2.5 initial student Proposals (added 9/14/2005)
  • Ss initial Proposals
  • Ss reactions to hearing themselves (added from what happened in the
    class
  • teachers first Proposal format submitted back to students

stage three questions (developing the Proposal)
  • What kind of goals will we set?
  • How will we record our progress towards our goals?
  • How will evaluate our effort?
  • Will it be a continuous effort or spread out over the semester?

stage four questions (adjusting the Proposal)
  • what’s working
  • what’s not
  • re-negotiating the Proposal

formal feedback

stage five questions
Weekly Proposal Format

The Audio Project
ESL-097
Advanced Listening and Speaking
9/19/2005

Part 1
Name, date, class, Project title

Part 2
My speaking Priority that I am going to work on.
(examples: speed, pronunciation at the end of words, the “p” sound, confidence)

Part 3
My process for working on my speaking Priority
1.
2.
3.
4.
5. etc.
6.

to be decided

Parts 4 and 5 --- my goals and my progress on goals also where to record problems I had and changes I will make
Proposal Format for the Audio Project
ESL-097 Advanced Listening and Speaking
9/29/2005

Part 1
Name, date, class, project title, Proposal number (new)

Part 2
What I am going focus on improving
(examples: speed, pronunciation at the end of words, the “p” sound, confidence)

Part 3
My Method for working on my speaking Priority
1. 
2. 
3. 
4. 
5. etc.

Part 4
Method evaluation. What worked, what didn’t work.
(1 paragraph min)

Part 5
Method changes I will make for my next Proposal –
( or why I will keep the same Method and recording)
(1 paragraph min)
Proposition Example for the Audio Project
ESL-097 Advanced Listening and Speaking
9/29/2005

Joel Cooke
9/29/2005
The Audio Project
Proposal #1

Focus: Strengthening the low notes in my singing

Method:
1. listen to the tape of my singing a number of times and find parts of the song where I have trouble with the low notes (15 minutes)
2. brainstorm some ideas how to work on those parts (20 min)
3. have another person who is a singer listen to those ideas and have them give me suggestions (30 min)
4. decide on what ideas I will practice (10 min)
5. practice those suggestions (30 min)
6. practice that song again listening carefully how I sing the low notes (10 min)
7. sing for another person and have them listen to the tape and see if they hear any difference (if time)
find another song with difficult low notes and practice that for a new recording on Tues (30 min)
Brainstorm Feedback Questions
ESL-097
10/13/2005

(question creators initials in parentheses)

Group 1
Did you work on your Method or just write it down? Why? (ok)
Did you do your Project with pleasure? Why or why not? (ok)
Did working on this Project embarrass you? In what way? (ok)

Group 2
What part of the Project was difficult for you to “get” or understand? (jo)
What part of the Project was the most difficult to work on? (jo)
What did you learn about yourself as a teacher of yourself? (jc)

Group 3
How would you change the Project to make it better for the next time? (jc)

Group 4
How did your Project add to you knowledge (or understanding) of your speaking? (jd)
How was the Project helpful to you? (jo)

Group 5
What do you think was the purpose (or purposes) of doing this Project? (lf)
Did you find any other value to this Project other than improving your speaking? If so what were they? How were they helpful or interesting? (jc)

Group 6
How did you feel about working on a Project that was an experiment? (jc)

Group 7
Anything else you want to say about the experience? (jc)
Time line of the Project

Class 1
Class start-up and first day logistics. Introduce the Project to the students and place the question before them “How would you use recording to work on your speaking?”

Class 2
Discussion with students about their ideas for recording. Framing the Project as an experiment on discovering ways to make recording useful.

Class 3
Hand out a document detailing of what we have come up with so far for a Project. Technical challenges necessitate a switch from video to digital audio recordings. Create sample 3-minute recordings of every student.

Class 4
Hand out CDs of student recordings from previous class. Discuss what to do with recordings. Assign students to create two “Proposals” of what they want to do with their recording.

Class 5
Students report on what they noticed from listening to their recording. Students struggle with ideas of what to do with recordings. Hand out updated (2nd) summary of what we have done so far.

Class 6
I decide to assume almost complete control over the logistics of the Project, including timeline, range of student choices for their Proposals, and output. Students chose their speaking Priority and developing a Method to work on that.

Class 7
Hand out timeline for Proposals. Work on individual student Methods and Proposals in whole group. Students make new recordings for use in their Proposals.
Class 8
Class discussion on goals and self-evaluation on Proposals.
Proposal format finalized.
Clarified expectation for output for each weekend’s homework.
Hand out CD’s of student recordings to students.

Class 9
Class discussion of successes and problems with completing Proposal 1.
Make new student recordings for Proposal 2 as necessary

Class 10
Hand out latest formats for Proposals.
Hand out my own Proposal - working on my singing
I sing in class.
Student support each other’s Proposals with in class whole group work
Work with student one on one with their Proposals

Class 11
Completed Proposal 2 due.
Slow day with little student responsiveness or enthusiasm in class
Late rescue by a student
Make recordings for next Proposals if needed by students.

Class 12
New ideas for Proposal 3 due.
One on one work with student on getting Proposal 3 ready for weekend work.
Set end of Project at completion of Proposal 4 (class15)
Hand out CD’s of students who made new recordings in class 11.

Class 13
Completed Proposal 3 due.
I sing again as part of my Proposal.
Begin feedback preliminaries with student brainstorm
Make new recordings for Proposal 4

Class 14
Hand out list of brainstormed feedback questions.
Do think, pair, share on brainstorm questions.

Class 15
Collect feedback questions and completed Proposal 4.
Class discussion of feedback questions
SAHRA ISAC
9/13/05

What could you do with a recording of your speaking to improve?

First and foremost I would listen to my speaking over and over again. Then I will try to point out the mistakes I made. Then I will think of ways and means to improve my speaking.

The second step I will do is to ask a friend of mine to listen to my speaking point out my mistakes. I ask my friend to ask me a similar topic and I talk about it in front of my friend.
How The Video Camera Helps Us To Improve The English Language

When people are in a conversation or telling a story, they don’t realize the mistakes their making, because in their mind their thinking ahead of what they want to say next. By listening and seeing myself on video, I realize that what I’m trying to say is not coming out clearly. By hearing myself speak, I realize sometimes I use unnecessary words, and say the same word over again and again. I realize that I misplace the words in a sentence. Sometimes I pronounce the words incorrectly.

By watching myself on video, I realize that when I speak, I use my hands a lot trying to explain what I am trying to say. The reason why I do that is because I have a hard time finding the correct word or words to say. I also pause when I trying to think of what I want to say.

By watching the first and last video, I realize that I’m making a lot of progress speaking. I believe that by watching different video’s, with different stories, is helping me to avoid mistakes that I’ve made in the past. The more video’s I watch, the better my English seems to get.
Olesya Kasianov
9.11.05

When I was listening to myself, I noticed that the way I pronounced my words, they need more improvement. When I speak in front of people especially in English, I get very nervous. I start to lose my words and mix them around. I need to speak English more and more often in front of people. This would help me not to be as shy and more comfortable with myself.

One way to improve my pronunciation is to record an American person's voice reading a text. By doing so I would be able to listen to that voice and hear the right way the words are spoken. Afterwards, I would read the same text, record myself and compare my pronunciation with the right way it is spoken. I can read a text over and over and then I record it again. I would do this as many times as I can, to pronounce the words the closest to the right way.
Sahra Isaac
9/20/05
Audio Project

The first thing I will be working on is confidence. How I'm going to work are:

- Having confidence in myself.
- Knowing everyone makes mistakes.
- Not worried about what I say.
- Always doing my best.
The Audio Project

ESL- 097

Radvila Graovac

9/20/2005

HOMEWORK

STEP 1: What you are going to work on it?
First I'll start working what I think that is my problem in speaking English and that is pronunciation words and repeated words.

STEP 2: How I am going to work on that?
I am going to try and do my best do improve my problems into the better ways by practicing for example like record my voice and see how am doing and after a while I'll do the same thing which is going to show me am I on the good way. Or pay to more attention on my speaking when I speak with native and ask them how I am doing. Problem with repeating is because I don't know many of English words that why ,I know I can change those simple words by learning new rich words and make my speeches more.
Sahra Isac
9/21/05

Audio Project

What I’m going to be working on is pronunciation.

The methods that I’m going to use on my speaking priority are:

- Listen to my recording. (3 min)
- Listen again and make a note of the words that I have hard time pronounce. (6 min)
- Ask a native student to pronounce them while listening. (6 min)
- Practice them by saying them out loud. (10 min)
- Record the same topic and listen to it for improvement.
Proposal #1

What I'm going to work on: Pronunciations

1. listen to my recording (3 min)
2. listen to American person recording (3 min)
3. identify the mistakes by comparing (7 min)
4. pick the difficult words or phrase (7 min)
5. to pronounce the difficult words and phrase slowly and careful (15 min)
6. increase the speed of pronunciation (10 min)
7. read whole text again (3 min)
8. record again (3 min)

9. For me this method is a good way to improve my pronunciations in difficult words and phrases. After I pronounced problem words slowly and carefully and then increase the speed of pronunciation to the regular tempo, I felt that my tongue and my mind got used to correct pronunciation.

10. I would improve this method by adding an native person the help me when I practice to say my problem phrase. That person could correct me so I could practice more productive.
2ND proposal

THE AUDIO PROJECT

NIH T DAM

9 / 27 / 2005

1. The first thing which i want to work on : confidence

2. The method i am going to use to work on my speaking priority :

   - I will find the topic that i would speak.

   - List of the questions or main ideas which concern about my topic.

   - Discuss and share with my partners in my group.

   - Practice a little bit in class and after that i start to record

3. My goal is trying to express myself more confidence to use words. How to reduce the repeat words and long pause.

4. I try to speak slowly how other people could understand me. I am a little embarrassed when i talk with native american because i don't feel confident enough to use words and make me stutters. I hope the ways i recognize would help me to improve it.
Sahra isac
10/2/05
Audio project

Proposal two

Pronunciation of the 'R'

I know what you're thinking that I am doing the same thing over again but my goal is not how many times I do it but to get it right.

My methods for this one are going to be:

- First and foremost I would listen to my recording and make a list of the words that I can't pronounce them (6min).
- I'll have a friend of mine listen it and go over my list and also find more mispronounce ones (6min).
- I'll have my friend pronounce them while listening (6min).
- Make notes of each word and do a recording too (10min).
- I'll practice those words by saying them out loud (30min).
- I'll re-read the text to see if there is improvement (15min).
- Have my friend listen to me while reading the text (3min).
Method evaluation

(4) My method didn't seemed to work for mispronounce of letter "R". I still have problem to pronounce words like nurse, worse horse and so on.

(5) I will change my method of reading a whole text, to just collect a bunch of words with the 'r' in it like nurse, horse, worse, and record them while saying them out loud.

I appreciate your effort on this project. You don't have the more obvious speaking challenges that other students do. I took effort on your part to find something to work on.

Thanks for helping with this project.
The Audio Project

The Proposal 2

1. Record your own voice and decide what you want to work on.

2. What I like to work on: Unnecessary words.

3. How I am going to work on that?
   By recording myself and listen (5 min)
   Have a USA student or a native speaker to listen to my recording (3 min)
   Ask him or her to point out my mistakes (5 min)
   Ask him or her to explain the right words I need to say.
   By reading more books and being around USA Student (talking to them) I think I can improve by using the right words.

4. How did my method work?
   In my opinion, my method works. By listening to my recording and practice, and taking my time before I speak, I can tell I am getting better. When I try to talk, I think before I speak.

5. I am going to try to work on something else. I like to work on pronouncing words. The reason why I'm changing the proposal is because I like to work on a few hard long words.
2ND PROPOSAL
THE AUDIO PROJECT
NHI T DAM
9 / 27 / 2005

1. The first thing which i want to work on: confidence to exchange or argue ideas with friends

2. The method i am going to use to work on my speaking priority:
   - I will find the topic that i would speak.
   - List of the questions or main ideas which concern about my topic.
   - Discuss and share with my partners in my group.
   - Practice a little bit in class and after that i start to record
   - Do my recording in class
   - Listen to my recording (5 minutes)
   - Find the mistakes that i make in my conversation. (10 minutes)
   - Write down my mistakes in paper (5 minutes)
   - Asking joel to help me correct my mistakes in class (10 minutes)
   - Exchange the ideas with my group about the mistakes that i had and also the mistakes of the members of my group too (15 or 20 minutes).

3. I think my method mentioned above was helpful. The topic that i chose a free topic so that we could find the ways speak more naturally and very interesting. The reason is everybody has different ways to support their ideas. Therefore, i could learn the ways they argue with me. That is kind of rebate, so i will improve my confidence and my friend as well. I try very hard to connect people in my group to talk as much as possible. However, i need to help find the useful way to express myself more and get more interesting about the topic.
4. Next proposal i will not change. The reason is i find the amazing way to study with my classmates. I can learn from them and they are too. The only thing i change is the topic and try to use a lot of words to describe the topic as much as possible. Thus, I will find another more interesting topic more describes and critics.

I appreciate your effort and ideas.

You inspired a number of other students with your project!

You also gave me some new ideas. Particularly to record again after working on your method to check for improvement.
#3
James Deng
10/6/05

Project  Pronunciation of difficult letters

Method:
1. Practice the ten words I chose from home for 10 minutes
2. Have some one listen to me say the difficult words for 5 minutes
3. Have that person correct me for how to pronounce the difficult letters
4. Have some one chose for me ten more words to practice and practice for 10 minutes
5. What works:
   1. I practiced the twenty difficult words for more than 20 minutes
   2. I had some one listened to me say 20 difficult words
   3. I had that person corrected me with how to say correct pronunciation
   4. At last the result of my practicing difficult words improved

Proposal
1. The practicing of the difficult words worked well
2. I'm ready to move for another topic
Olesya Kasianov

10-4-05

ESI-097

Proposal #3

What am I going to work on: Pronunciations difficult words and phrases.

1. listen my recording (3 min)
2. listen to American person reading (3 min)
3. identify the mistakes by comparing (10 min)
4. Pick the difficult words or phrase you had a problem with. (10 min)
5. to pronounce these words and phrase slowly and careful with native person who can correct you (15 min)
6. increase the speed of pronunciation (10 min)
7. Read whole text again under the observation of native person. (4 min)
8. in one day to repeat #5,6, and 7 (30 min)
9. in two days repeat #5,6, and 7 (30 min)
10. record again (4 min)

Method Evaluation:

11. For me this method really works. When I practiced not once but few times a day after that day I felt my tongue and my mind got used to correct pronunciation for a long time not just for one day.

Changes:
12. Listening to the CD of my talking I noticed that my reading became much faster than my talking about something. I will change my focus to speeding of my talking. I need more practice with my talking about any topic to think faster and speak faster.

I was very excited to follow your method and progress. What you noticed and worked on seemed important to you. I hope the project was beneficial.
Sahra isac
10/2/05
Audio project
Proposal three

**Pronunciation of words with ‘r’ only**

**METHODS:**

Collect a bunch of words with the ‘r’ in like nurse, worse, and horse.

- Make a recording(3min)
- Mr. Cook records the same words on my disc too(3min)
- Listen to my recording and Mr. Cook’s.(3min)
- Listen again and write out the mispronounced words.(10min)
- Practice those words like a song by saying them out loud.(30min)
- Ask a friend to listen to me while pronounce them and make out suggestions.

4 I listened to my recording and I couldn’t understand some of the words that I was saying like nurse, early and Portland, but when I listen to the teacher’s recording I understood it. It seems like my tongue is heavy. I need to work on it more and I need to do more recording.
since this project is not about competition but how I get it right.

I'm still going to do the same thing; focusing on my pronouncing of the letter r. My fourth proposal is about the r too. This time I will do one more recoding and also I will make a habit to sing those words all time and get them right.

I really was interested in your observation about your tongue being heavy. That made a lot of sense to me. I also agree about this not being a competition. But an opportunity to find what you need to work on it and to discover for yourself how you will best address that.

Also the "sing" part. I am very interested in what you are talking about or did you mean "use"?
Radmila Graovac

10/11/2005

The Audio Project

Proposal # 4

Focus: Working on my long pauses in my daily conservation

Method:

1) Make conservation with native friend (4 minutes)

2) Ask friend to pay attention on my speaking (3 minutes)

3) Make together the list where I make long pauses most in conservation (4 minutes)

4) Discuss about it and figure out solution (5-6 minutes)

5) Get advice from native friend what I can do while we doing conservation (4 minutes)

6) Doing natural conservation with native as often as possible (5 minutes)

7) Replaced long pauses with talking about interesting topic with native friend (6 minutes)

8) Keep working on this whatever I have chance and think deep while I speak what to say to avoid long pauses (4 minutes)
Method Evaluation:
I can said that this method helped me little bit it opened my mind to think deeply about long pauses which I make in daily conservation and I also find out why? I thought that I can’t said much about topic to be more like flow without making long pauses. I came up with this when I do conservation I should keep talking whenever is in my mind about some topic and to not think about anything else.

Changes to Method:
I will not change my focus or method I think that’s it.

I was interested in your observation about your long pauses? why did you feel it was important to fill them? Or maybe why did you think you had time in the first place?
1) What you are going to work on: using unnecessary words that I don't need.

1) What is the method you are going to use to work on your speaking priority?

1. Listen to my recording and find out what are the unnecessary words that I am using (2 min)
2. Write a few sentences and put the unnecessary words in the sentence, and I will try to read the sentence without the unnecessary words (15 min)
3. Make a list of all the unnecessary words and find out why I use unnecessary words (10 min)
4. Ask a Native American to listen to your recording (2 min)
5. Find out what the Native American thinks which ones are your unnecessary words and work on it by writing sentences with the unnecessary words. And see if it needs to be in the sentence.

Questions 4 & 5
4. How did your method work?
My method did work success, by writing sentences, putting on unnecessary words than read out loud the sentences and taking the unnecessary words did help me. Also asking a Native American to listen my recording, and asking them to point out what are my unnecessary did help me.

6. Describe what you want to change? I honestly don’t want to change nothing, I think my method worked fine, and it did help me. Now I can understand what are unnecessary words, simply it means words you don’t need

I thought your method was very creative to consciously put in unnecessary words as a way of noticing your use of them. How did you come up with that idea?
4th PROPOSAL

THE AUDIO PROJECT

NHI T DAM

10 / 11 / 2005

1. FOCUS: Pronunciation

2. METHOD:

- Finding the text book to read
- Practicing at home a few times
- Finding out the words that need help before doing the recording
- Recording my voice
- Recording Joel's voice
- Listening my recording (5 minutes)
- Writing out the words that I am still not very clear or understanding. (10 minutes)
- Asking Joel to give me some suggestion (10 minutes)
- Trying to fix my problems and correct them. (20 minutes)
- Doing the recording again and make sure my words pronounce accurately. (5 minutes)

3. EVALUATION:
I could see my mistakes easily by comparing between two recording me and Joel. I tried to correct them and read smoothly those words. I feel I pronounce better than before.

4. Change

If I changed, I would like to move on speed of speaking. I could listen and understand what people want to say to me. However, when I express my ideas I feel very difficult for me. I hope that next project could help more about speaking.

I think your idea of 5 sound recording, one I would like to use in the future. I think I will move to get more recording. Thanks for your good idea.
EVA TUCCI
ESL-097
10/18/05

Brainstorm Feedback Questions

Answer 1 I worked on my project very hard. I study my method so my project will
Work. The reason why I work so hard is because it helps me to learn from
my mistakes and my weaknesses and to help me to speak proper English.
This project did not embarrass me because this class helps me to learn the
English language better and to be more comfortable when I speak.

Answer 2 I didn’t find any part of the project difficult to work on because the
Method of the proposal helps me to understand and to learn my weakness
In the English language.

Answer 3 I understood the project we worked on but I think the way to help the class
Understand better would be to have more information for the method to
Work for the proposal. More practice and studying would help for the
Project to be easier next time.

Answer 4 This project was helpful for me because it helped me to learn from my
Mistakes and it helped me to correct my speaking. After this project, I
Noticed that my language is improving, for example: I take my time and I
Think before I speak (misplacing words). I pause before I speak
(unnecessary words). I pronounce the words better when I talk.

Answer 5 The purpose for doing this project, in my opinion, helped me to improve
My speaking. Also it helped me to learn from my mistakes when I talk.
Another value learned from this project is that I feel more confident when
I speak and I feel more comfortable when I’m talking with a group of
People. I don’t feel shy talking because I can pronounce the words much
Better than I used to.

Answer 6  Working on this project, I felt very confident and very relaxed because
I wanted to learn and to prevent my speech and the way I talk. This
Project was an experiment for me to find ways on how to improve my
Language and to learn how to correct my mistakes when I speak.

Eva,

Thanks for embracing this
project and finding out
how to make it work for you
when I first-thought of this
project I hoped it would
work the way you did it.

What was the most important
aspect of the design of
this project that supported
your learning?
Feedback Questions

Group 1) I had pleasure all the time while working on my project because, everything was interesting, fun sometimes confused but it was all new to me new experience.

Group 2) It was difficult for me to understand what was the point of this project in the beginning. Like I didn't know what I am supposed to do in my proposal. I didn't know that I have to write and make my proposal question more specific, later my teacher explain to me and I was doing fine then.

Group 3) I would like to change the project, maybe in this way like getting example of someone previous project before we start doing ours next time, so we get no confusion.
Group 4) this project was helpful to me because I learned how to come with new ideas. How to think in a specific ways. While I listen my recording I become more aware of my mistakes by feeling when you listen your own voice.

Group 5) Purpose by doing this project was is we going to through those proposals identify our mistakes and work on it.

Group 6) I felt positive working on this project it makes me to focus on an experiment that I didn't work on before.

The project was difficult in the beginning, we were all finding our way. Thanks for "hanging in there" and help making it work.

I had purposes with this project other than improving Your Speaking. Any guesses?

Did you develop awareness of areas that you felt you needed to work on? Do you think their method of working on them made you more nervous about speaking or more confident?
My Thoughts

At the beginning of the project I love the idea that we were going to do video recording. But of course some people didn’t feel comfortable watching their self on a TV. Even though I felt comfortable I had to respect the others and go with their idea. Plus I guess I was overvoted by the majority of the class so we would do the Audio Project. The reason I wanted to do a video recording is because my English is good and all but I wanted to look at my body language. I wanted to observe how I talked and if I was using my hands while I was talking. Or if I use my head more often for example if I tilted it a lot.

Getting to the point of why I didn’t enjoy the project is because it’s really hard for me to do the methods so I just wrote it down. Another reason is, for one I didn’t understand the purpose of the methods. I also felt dumb because everyone knew what they were doing and I didn’t have felt like I didn’t have and difficult time with my speaking. You could have probably told that I didn’t do it with “I need to pass the class” attitude. My heart wasn’t fully into the project.

The reason why the project was very difficult for me was because I didn’t quit get why we had to keep doing proposals. If we did such a great job on one Audio then what was the point of doing another. To me one proposal was good enough and I couldn’t just lie and do another then of course I wouldn’t know what to write about. My method for one like I said I couldn’t make up some method if I didn’t have any proposals. As I was not getting the hang of my project I noticed that I did have some issues with my speaking. I noticed that I used a lot of unnecessary
words in my speaking. That I thought was the only helpful thing that came out of the project. I learned that I could use other proper words instead of unnecessary words.

From all that I have done I really thought I would get something out of this other than my help with unnecessary words. I felt that it was a really good experiment because I felt like I had to make-up something to write about for my methods. So that was kind of hard for me. Throughout this project I felt confused and embarrassed watching other students doing their work and I just not quit getting it the whole thing. Don’t get me wrong Mr. Joel but I really was stuck on how I could write down my proposals. I am not saying that you didn’t explain it enough, you did you explained it really well but it was hard for me to make up stuff. That’s something I have to learn for the future.
Hamdi Abdi
10/24/2005
Feedback Questions

Group 1.

I worked this project with pleasure, because I wanted to achieve my goal of pronouncing words well, and this project helped me a lot with my pronunciation. I felt comfortable doing this project, and not embarrassed at all.

Group 2.

The part of the project that I had difficult to understand was how to put methods together, and how to do the steps of the method. When the teacher showed us examples on the board, and the singing method helped me a lot to finish my method. Once that is all done, everything that comes next felt easier. I learned that if you do everything that has being taught to you, you could do it by yourself.

Group 3.

To make it better, I will consider the teacher to write out the methods, and the steps, and for the student to follow the teacher's lead. From this point the project will be easier for the student to do.

Group 4.

This project improved my speaking, and the pronunciation of the long words. Such as “Park”, and everything to that category.
Group 5.

The purpose of doing this project was to help the student that English is their second language, also to overcome the accent, and how we speak. At the end, most of the student will see a difference between the beginning of the class and now. I find out that everyone in the class was interested to speak well no matter where they were from.

Group 6.

I feel excitement, this project helped me with the difficulties that had in English pronunciations, which was long words with the “p” sound. From now on I will keep practicing the words.

Group 7.

I never did such experiment as this before, but now I can relate to this project.
Feedback on Audio Project.

The Audio project that I have had was so interesting. Audio Project to me was to strengthen the ESL students for college writing. The project covered many essential areas of writing. For example, the organization of the program was very good, because the pace of carrying out the experiment was so comfortable. However, the schedules for the students activities were convenience as to students comfort ability. Recording the difficult words also recording the dialogue between the students was so important. This conversation between students help build self confident to my self and to other students with in the program.

Audio project for the first two week was confusing and that was because it is my first time to do the experiment. But after I concentrate on my experiments, I began to build confident to my self by carefully observe the difficulties I encounters during my communicating to native speakers.

In addition, audio project is the way to prepare ESL students to be ready for real college writing. With audio project, I learned how to be aware of the difficult words and how to solve their difficult pronunciation. The project however, has enhanced a rapport between the students and the teacher.

In conclusion, having known the essential of audio program I would like its continuation to other ESL students. These ESL students would also do their best by expanding the audio project in their experiments, which would encourage audio project to be a model for ESL students to make them good speakers and excellent writers.

I was surprised when you wrote that the audio project covered many areas of writing... what did you mean? I am glad you found the recording and the conversation helpful for your confidence. I am also glad that the project began right over time. Thanks for working on it.