TEACHING ISSUES AND INSIGHTS IN
JAPANESE HIGH SCHOOL

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ABSTRACT

This paper has emerged from a review of reflective teaching journals I kept during the interim year component of my Master of Arts in Teaching program. Through this review of my journals I identified five recurrent teaching issues that played a central role in my teaching over this year. In the paper I examine the areas of team teaching, feedback, student needs, discipline, and classroom management for insights and solutions that served me during the interim year and will be useful to me when I encounter similar situations in the future.

ERIC Descriptors:
Teaching in Japanese High School
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Feedback
Discipline
Classroom Management
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“The discoveries I make about myself when I remember the encounters that have shaped and revealed myself are sometimes embarrassing – but they are also real. Whatever the cost in embarrassment, I will know myself better, and thus be a better teacher, when I acknowledge the forces that play within me instead of allowing them to wreak witless havoc on my work.”

(Palmer, 1998, p. 29)

CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

This paper identifies and examines five critical aspects of my teaching that arose in my reflective teaching journals which were written during the Interim Year Teaching Practicum (IYTP) component of my Master of Arts in Teaching (MAT) program at the School for International Training (SIT). The five issues were team teaching, feedback, student needs, discipline, and classroom management. This review of my reflective teaching journals provided additional understanding of these issues which have helped shape the insights I have gained while teaching in Japan.

Background

I have been fortunate to have experienced teaching opportunities which have challenged me throughout the years I have been in Japan. My initial two years of teaching in Japan were in an English conversation school based in Osaka and Kyoto. Much of this time was spent learning and experiencing Japanese culture, making friends with students and colleagues, and exploring a variety of language teaching methods and techniques. In the classroom, I was mostly a technician during the first few years of teaching, applying the audiolingual methods and techniques that I had had to memorize during standardized teacher training programs. Over time, I refined teaching materials and methods of delivery in the classroom. I found that when I put a lot of energy into
lesson preparation and materials, students responded positively, and I felt gratified that my efforts had been acknowledged. However, as I began teaching larger high school classes, my interaction with students changed dramatically. I realized that a successful lesson with one group of students did not guarantee a similar level of participation from other classes at the same grade level. I noticed that I was having difficulties with the management of my classes but I did not have the time to carefully examine all the issues involved. It was not until I began my Interim Year Teaching Practicum (IYTP), following my first summer of the Summer MAT program, that I began to feel that I could start to address some of the issues that I was identifying in my teaching. The work I did using reflective teaching journals facilitated by my IYTP supervisor, Claire Stanley, was instrumental in articulating, understanding and working on these issues.

During my IYTP, I kept a reflective teaching journal while I was teaching in two different high schools. For the first seven months of my IYTP I was teaching high school students with team teachers. The only time I taught on my own during this period was for my teacher observation with Claire Stanley. In the last two months of the Interim Year Teaching Practicum, I was teaching in a different high school without team teachers.

During the period of my IYTP, I carefully reflected on my work using reflective teaching journals to focus on specific areas of teaching which needed investigation. The focus of these reflective teaching journals was to identify and track problem issues in the classroom for the duration of my IYTP. The issues that arose were collaboratively explored with my colleagues and supervisor, which led to a number of alternative ways of addressing the classroom topic under investigation.

**Reflective Teaching Journals and The Metanet**

For the IYTP project, I posted weekly summaries of my reflective teaching journals
on-line using a specific conference designed and managed by an organization known as Metanet. For a period of nine months from October 1997 to June 1998, I recorded my views and thoughts concerning each lesson I taught in a journal, which described the main incident that I wanted to explore. My reflective teaching journal community, which read and commented on my postings, consisted of five members; our supervisor Claire Stanley and four Summer Master of Arts in Teaching (SMAT16) program students.

After a few months of posting journal entries and reading colleagues journals, we added discussion folders to initiate dialogues and elaborate on issues that were important to our professional growth. In this study, I have selected entries from both the reflective teaching journals, and the following discussion threads that we developed over the term of this project: “Deepening the Feedback”, “Teacher Presence”, and “What is Effective Classroom Management?” I have also included several of Claire Stanley and Jack Millett’s, (our MAT faculty supervisors) comments that pertain to the issues under examination.

In the reflective teaching journals I was asked to format my comments according to the four stages of the experiential learning cycle:

*The Concrete Experience*

*Reflective Observation: What happened?, and Why did it happen?*

*Abstract Conceptualization: What are some possible solutions?*

*Active Experimentation: What’s next?*

To illustrate, I include below a reflective teaching journal entry that I wrote and Claire Stanley’s response to that journal entry.

1:1) 05-OCT-97 8:12 Robert Taferner

*I gave an assignment to my high school students for homework.*

Class 1: More than half of the students didn't look at the homework. About 5 out of 44 did any of the
work. Apparently kids in high school never do any research/project work. So when confronted with this they didn't want to go to the effort of finding out how to get the information.

Class 2: Situation same as Class 1 above. I learned that the school has a library! We took them there and the students immediately proceeded to research the information they needed for a class assignment. Most of the students did it. Most of the kids had fun and learned something outside their usual environment.

Reflection: Don't give the students homework unless they are highly eager to do it, and have the necessary knowledge to find information on their own.

The following entry is an example of one of Claire Stanley’s comments on the content of my entry and the process of our journal entries. This entry helped me to clarify my thoughts as we began sharing our experiences with Metanet.

1:7) 13-OCT-97 11:33 Claire Stanley
"What happened?" and then ask yourself,
"So what?" and then think about "Now what?"

The description part is the "What happened" and then the "So what?" is looking at what's important in what happened. Finally, the "Now what?" is looking at what you can apply next time to your teaching based on the experience that you've already had.

Rob's entry had a nice example of using one experience where the research project didn't work and then of his finding out about taking the students to the library and how once the students were in the library, they got excited about doing the research assignment. In his reflection section, he talks about making sure that students have access to doing the task on their own. This is a valuable insight. One could easily think that students are lazy and just don't want to do the homework, but upon investigation, Rob was able to find a way to get them into the experience so that they could complete it on their own. This shows examples of "So What? And Now What?"

Claire Stanley was commenting on the content of my experience. This allowed me to recognize and reflect on my problem issues, prior to further experiment in the classroom.

In addition to writing my reflections and getting comments from my advisor, I also reviewed my colleagues’ entries. This facilitated a better understanding of how other teachers addressed classroom issues and implemented changes. Sharing journal entries with my colleagues allowed me to be in contact with other teachers’ lives, in and out of the classroom. As a group, we read and commented on colleagues’ entries and participated in discussion folders that led to
greater understandings of the thoughts of others, as we applied these insights in our own classroom.

In the excerpt below, Claire Stanley highlights the power of peer mentorship during our project.

1:42) 28-NOV-97 1:32 Claire Stanley 
What is striking me is the power of collective reflection - how powerful it is for each of you to read one another’s entries and even though you do not respond to one another in this file, there is a tremendous impact. It's almost like active listening as each person has their own space to express themselves and you are all able to take the person in and be with them in whatever way they are struggling or succeeding. What I'm also noticing is that you are beginning to understand what it means to take an issue and to track it, to investigate it from many angles, and to formulate an action plan as to how to continue to proceed further with the investigation. Perhaps my directives in this file have helped and perhaps my one on one discussions with you during the week visit. But I also believe there is a tremendous power in the overhear (overread in this case) position as you all, in effect, watch one another conduct experiments in your classes. By reading one another's classroom based research data, by getting into each other's heads as to why you are doing what you are doing and what the impact is on your students, you influence one another's thinking in a way that is clearly beneficial and meaningful. It's the power of a conversation in a classroom where everyone is engaged in their own individual work while simultaneously being interested in and affected by everyone else's work. As you listen to one another, you hone your own thinking, your own investigative skills and your creativity is triggered. As far as feedback on the skill of reflection goes, I will do a rundown of each of the entries I just read from each of you and give you and the whole group my take on how you can refine and sharpen your skills in reflective thinking and reflective action. For Rob, he talks about setting clear expectations for behavior, about connecting to each class's different needs. He reports his awareness that his tighter classes (less jovial) probably had more students' learning less material whereas in the past fewer students were learning more. This is a useful research question to track - to really find the data to prove that this is or isn't true. What does it mean to meet the needs of learners?

Here, Claire Stanley rephrased what I had written in a previous entry and then added her views to benefit my classroom research. Although her comments were directed toward my personal issues, others in the Metanet group were also able to benefit from our exchange. I was involved with this type of posting and on-line dialog throughout nine months of my IYTP. This further led to the investigation of my journal entries, which resulted in uncovering five critical issues in the classroom.
Selection of Critical Issues in the Classroom

At the end of my IYTP, I looked back on the on-line conference to gain a clearer sense, primarily of the teaching issues that evolved while I identified recurring themes. I then decided to sort all my journal entries into thematic categories according to their content in order to more clearly state the issues that I faced. I edited journal entries to suit the topic being discussed maintaining chronological order of the journals wherever possible for this project. Afterwards, I reviewed comments Claire Stanley and Jack Millett had made and included additional reflective teaching journals I had not entered on the Metanet to help form the current perspectives I now have on these classroom issues.

Organization of the Paper

Chapters 2 and 3 review individual issues and relevant entries. In addition to the reflective teaching journal entries, some quotations throughout my paper help detail my teaching insights. These readings furthered my understanding of my role in teaching high school in Japan, as well as added depth to my beliefs and assumptions about teaching. Finally, I will summarize my experience in Chapter 4.
“Being present may not only mean letting go of, or changing, the sequence of a particular approach or exercise. It may also mean letting go of the goal, the purpose of the day’s class. The teacher must be willing wrestle with the decision about whether the original goal is more important than something that comes up in the moment.”

(Kessler, 1991, p. 13)

CHAPTER 2
TEAM TEACHING, FEEDBACK AND STUDENT NEEDS

This chapter illustrates and details the importance of reflective teaching journals in increasing my understanding of my work in the Japanese high school system. Through reviewing my journals, I isolated critical issues in the classroom that required further exploration for my development. In the following sections, I introduce team teaching, feedback, student needs, and then present relevant journal entries which depict problems and personal insights into these issues.

Team Teaching

In my first years of teaching in Japan, my role in classes taught with a Japanese Teacher of English (JTE) ranged from playing a marginal role such as reading a passage aloud, to teaching in co-operation with the JTE’s guidance and support, to having almost total autonomy within the classroom with little interaction with the JTEs. When teaching in co-operation with the JTE, the class would most often start with my team teacher bringing students to attention. Then it would be my role to lead them into the warm-up and language activities. My Japanese team teachers occasionally helped prepare quizzes and exams.

When I returned from my first summer at SIT, the JTEs with whom I was teaching allowed me greater freedom to implement and experiment with what I had learned at SIT. I quickly discovered that when I tried a new teaching approach which addressed students’ affective and cognitive needs, student engagement was different from what they were accustomed to in
other classes. I asked them to work in pairs and small groups during personalized language activities, allowed for mistakes in the learning process, and changed aspects of a lesson to accommodate slower students. This experimentation with language activities and students engagement seemed to provoke resistance from my JTE’s, possibly due to the deviation from rote learning and testing. This conflict is shown in the following entry.

1:25) 31-OCT-97 23:18 Robert Taferner (Part 1)
Over the past two weeks, I've been thinking about my role in high school classes with my Japanese team teacher. Our ideas conflict. It’s difficult to determine and plan a strategy for how to best meet the needs of the students when the team teacher seems oblivious to the cognitive needs of the students other than language acquisition through grammar translation.

Over the course of my time spent with this teacher, we had conflicting ideas regarding how to address students’ learning needs while teaching and interacting in the classroom. I began to see that my experimentation with the Silent Way and Community Language Learning conflicted with his use of grammar translation. The Silent Way and Community Language Learning approaches require students to think for themselves or with other students while trying to reach solutions to problems. Grammar translation gives answers often without students exploring and further understanding why or how language is used. It places little emphasis on the students’ affective needs and rarely addresses the students’ cognitive needs. At SIT I had become aware of a variety of language learning techniques, methods and approaches (e.g., Larsen-Freeman, 1986), which addressed students’ needs. When I returned from SIT, I wanted to discuss some of these discoveries with my colleagues and experiment with what I learned in the classroom. We had, however, little time to explore educational philosophies and classroom techniques, due to our busy teaching schedules. I now realize that it was difficult for my colleagues to grasp what I was trying to implement in the classroom without investing a tremendous amount of time in the process. Without this understanding, it was impossible for my JTEs to accept what I was doing.
Due to heavy teaching commitments and the pressures that are part of the profession, our discussions became less frequent. When I tried new methods and techniques that facilitated an improvement in my teaching approach, they frequently resulted in ecstatic approval from my team teachers. On the other hand, when an activity failed, or there was a lack of understanding, negative feedback from a team teacher and resistance was a consequence, as seen in entry 1:81.

1:81) 05-FEB-98 3:04 Robert Taferner

I would like to describe a situation between one of my team teachers and myself.

Background: I've been unhappy about our interaction in the classroom since I came back from SIT. I feel that my understanding of the students' needs has increased tremendously. Now the question is how to reach my students' needs without a major conflict with the team teacher. This involves sensitive cultural and interpersonal issues both inside and outside the classroom.

For the past few weeks, I have been asserting myself more by evaluating my students' assignments and playing a more prominent role in the classroom.

What happened?: In yesterday's lesson, with my 2nd year high school students, I directed the class using minimal Japanese. When it came to the listening quiz, I soon realized that the students could not cope with the language and reverted to Japanese. My team teacher responded with direct grammar translation, a teaching method I oppose. I then tried to return to an English learning situation without the use of grammar translation. I began eliciting responses from students and writing the ideas on the board using what had been successful in my other classes to get the students working together and focused on a problem. I thought it was successful but we were unable to finish the quiz.

Between classes, my team teacher voiced his disapproval of what I had done during class. He said, "... that meaning and understanding are not important. Many students don't like English." I conceded the point and let him lead the next class. In the next class, spoken English was used about 5% of the time and the activities were turned into reading and writing utilizing grammar translation under controlled and familiar conditions. Wow! It's hard trying to be a better teacher under these conditions.

His concern is ... well I don't think I really know at this time, but I do know that he fears losing control to me in the classroom. After our last lesson of the day together, we spoke and voiced our concerns. Control and responsibility for the class is his, so, I told him that he should make the decisions about what he wants in his class and that the conflict was only a natural part of our growth.

This incident with my JTE was a turning point in our teaching relationship. After contemplating the dynamics of the situation that had occurred in the classroom, I realized that we needed time to further discuss our teaching approaches and goals for our students. Without expressing our views,
I saw that a detrimental impasse would have ensued. Before the next class we taught together the following week, we had an opportunity to voice our respective views, which facilitated a stronger acknowledgement of our professional needs in the classroom.

What happened? The following Monday we discussed what had occurred in our last class. The discussion started with an immediate apology on his part. He also described his inability to develop a good rapport with students in other classes. After I explained my thoughts and shared my recent journal entries, we continued working constructively together.

The above entry illustrates an important step in my professional growth as I tried to voice my opinions more emphatically and increase my role and responsibility in the classroom. Prior to my Interim Year Teaching Practicum, I had often felt that when teaching with a team teacher in Japan, a compromise of my beliefs might have been the best way to adapt to the system for the overall good of my students. In Japan, confrontations are generally avoided, and harmony between individuals is viewed as being of prime importance. From this experience, I learned that when attempting anything outside the norm in the classroom, care, sensitivity, time for reflection, and continuous collaboration are the keys to successful implementation.

Another major recurring problem I faced was that occasionally, facts concerning school events and relevant student information were not made available to me. I began to see that not having this information occasionally led to misunderstandings between students and myself. The next entry shows an unexpected event that took place in the classroom which could have been averted had I been forewarned about a particular problem student.

Note: At times there are students that don't participate, don't interact in the classroom, and don't do homework or write quizzes.
What happened?:
1. I approached a student whom I thought was having problems during one of the individual activities. I asked him if he understood the activity and/or needed my help. He said he understood and would participate.
2. After 5 minutes I approached him again and asked what was wrong in front of the whole class. He stood-up and left the classroom.

Summary:
I made this student’s experience intolerable by focusing attention on him. I later learned that he had been having problems at school for the past month and a half. I certainly had a negative impact on this student. This incident showed me how little I understood my high school students and how fragile they are.

What to do in the future: Ask for HELP! Seek and insist on open channels of communication between administration, homeroom teachers, and faculty.

The summaries in the preceding entry emphasize the importance of sharing information between administrators and teachers. Information that would assist me in the classroom was often not forthcoming, unless explicitly requested, or until a problem arose. To solve this problem of lack of information exchange in the future, I compiled an extensive list of questions which I derived from my experiences in the classroom. I then began scheduling meetings with team teachers and fellow staff at the beginning of school terms and periodically throughout the year to ensure I got the information I needed. This process helped me to better understand my teaching environment and fellow staff, which aided in the facilitation of an enriching teaching and learning experience.

Summary
This review of my reflective teaching journals addressed my team teaching role, experimentation with new approaches, techniques, and methods, and teaching with limited student information. I discovered the necessity of creating time for continuous discussion with my team teaching colleagues to enhance our students learning environment. Since there are always external factors that constantly arise which influence the classroom, it is crucial to allow time to establish ongoing channels of communication with the high school staff so as to create a professional
teaching environment.

Feedback

Structured feedback refers to specific feedback which I obtained through written questionnaires or verbally at the end of activities or classes, while ongoing feedback refers to feedback received through observing students interaction with classmates and myself, classroom activities, and the language content of each lesson throughout the school term. I experimented with various forms of structured and ongoing feedback in order to facilitate a better understanding of how to improve the next class.

Initially, I asked students how they liked an activity at the end of the class. Their response was initially measured by raising their hands if they thought the activity was easy, ok, difficult, interesting, or boring. I found that this type of structured feedback only moderately useful at first, because many students did not understand the implications of their feedback, nor did they feel the necessity to respond to my questions.

Later, I found that written structured feedback was more useful than oral feedback because students were more willing to respond in writing. When I asked students for written feedback in either Japanese or English, their responses overall were well thought out and quite helpful as I noted in my Metanet Feedback Discussion entry:

9:2) 17-JAN-98 3:28 Robert Taferner (Part 1)
Over the past 4 months I’ve been using written feedback in the form of class surveys.

These class surveys have been useful in attaining information such as abilities in the 4 skills, level of engagement, energy, focus, students’ interests, needs for self expression, whole group and individual teacher-student and student-student interaction. I think all visible forms of gathering feedback/student input has helped me differentiate between my large number of classes, and share responsibility with my team teachers and students for enriching the learning environment.
After four months of reflective writing during my IYTP, I was becoming more receptive to the feedback I was receiving. I was beginning to acknowledge the differences between each class due to the comments I was receiving from the students. Feedback helped me realize that each class related to both the subject and myself differently. Some classes seemed to like one activity more than another activity; some worked well in groups, others thought it was a waste of time. Energy levels differed from class to class. At times, students were hungry before lunch or sleepy shortly after lunch. There were also language level differences between classes of the same year that I had to take into account as I planned my lessons.

An important insight I found was that students began to feel empowered due to the fact that they were listened to, and that their opinions on what and how they wanted to learn could be modified through the written feedback they were expressing. This is shown below:

9:22) 24-APR-98 5:01 Robert Taferner

**Written feedback:**
In my previous high school, I asked for written feedback 3 times from September to the end of the school year in March. In each case, I allowed the feedback to be anonymous and written in Japanese. I've found that the comments were more truthful and useful as time went on.

I used feedback to refine my lessons and to encourage student control of their learning. The students soon found that they were being listened to, and that they could make changes to their classroom environment. I believed this to be the most useful and exciting aspect of my study.

To further my exploration of the classroom, I also began including student centered activities that required marginal input from me, which I could include in my lessons that would allow me observation and note-taking time, thus increasing my receptivity to the students’ ongoing feedback. The kind of ongoing feedback I was interested in at this time, was observation of students’ interaction during a variety of different classroom language learning activities, the affective aspect of the task, and their cognitive ability to understand the language used.

This process of feedback observation led to development of reacting in the moment to
help facilitate activities by acknowledging and reacting to students’ affective and/or cognitive needs. This is apparent when students were engaged in an activity and responding well to the task, as I illustrate in the entry below:

9:2) 17-JAN-98 3:28 Robert Taferner (Part 2)
I’m now focusing on feedback in action. By using fewer materials, I’m forcing myself to develop my skills to bend and manipulate situations that will continually interest and encourage my students to use their powers of observation to uncover the puzzle they’re working on.

In the example below, I illustrate how being in the moment added to this student being valued for his contribution and helped to create an environment that was engaging and supportive.

10:19) 26-FEB-98 2:35 Robert Taferner
New territory came from one of my under-confident adult students whom I taught at a small English conversation school. As of late, he's “turned-on”. Sure, learning English is part of his experience, but, I think what is capturing him, is that we are listening to, responding to and respecting what he has to offer in the moment. Being present and acting in the moment has made certain aspects of classes I teach refreshing, stimulating and unpredictable. Students who are engaged at this level are eager to jump in and experience themselves and others around them. This same student said he learns best when many mediums are used and when the lesson leaves a positive impression on him.

The question I have is, how is such an environment created? Should the students be responsible, and how much control is needed for facilitating their experience?

I asked these ongoing feedback questions in my entry to get a better understanding of how to adapt to benefit my students learning. I understood that by engaging them in the moment, they would benefit tremendously. I felt that I was succeeding because they were able to overcome their inhibitions to speak. At this point, I was focusing on getting students in a supportive environment by observing their responses and adjusting appropriately, so they could affectively invest themselves in the language. Jack Millett adds his personal insight in creating such a learning environment by preparing multiple lesson plans, which allows him to relax and focus on the present moment. In this relaxed and present state, Jack Millett can address ongoing feedback of the students to help force awareness, as shown in the entry below:
In this study of my students’ feedback, I made some very concrete changes in the way I interacted with my students and the content of a lesson. I became aware of the necessity to watch the feedback of students very carefully so I could more closely match the contents of the lesson with their needs in the moment.

My use of feedback effectively increased to the point that I was able to respond well to ongoing feedback, which was confirmed by the positive changes in classroom dynamics as I interacted with students in the classroom. In the entry below, I noticed how a change in the seating arrangements not only allowed for more English being spoken but fostered greater enthusiasm for engagement in and completion of the task.
relationship with them. As activities shifted from whole class to smaller groups and pairs, English usage generally increased. During this time, I circulated around the class to answer questions and remind them to speak English. In one class last week, I stopped a pair activity because too much Japanese was being used. I asked what was wrong. A few students said they didn't like the activity so I dropped it and told them get their books and a pen and sit in a circle. (This was a test to see if, and how long it would take to set-up a circle and see how much influence "good" students had on students not doing the work properly). Within a minute or so, they were sitting in chairs around the middle of the class with anticipation. I began with a "Who am I?" presentation from an A/B exchange in the book. The energy peaked right before the A/B exchange. As soon as they opened their books I felt the energy dissipate. On the other-hand, more students completed the task in English, but some still played around.

From this experience, I found that making a circle equals high energy and a time to have fun and share something with the group. In the future I can now design materials and use this classroom arrangement with more confidence.

My Metanet discussion entries depict not only how the students responded to the feedback questions, but also how I developed my ability to interpret their ongoing feedback. That is, the more times I asked for their feelings about an activity or experience, the closer I understood why an activity was successful or unsuccessful. This process also helped me identify the need to look at their responses in combination with my own intuition, before making changes. Feedback was useful in evaluating my feelings, reactions, and the materials I was using as an indicator of a successful language exchange.

Summary

The use of structured and ongoing feedback helped me teach lessons that more closely addressed students’ learning needs in the classroom. I found initially that written structured feedback in the form of surveys to be the most effective in getting useful feedback from my students. Over the course of the term students felt empowered when I was able to alter classroom activities which suited their learning needs. As this relationship grew, structured feedback became even more reliable as students’ responses became more truthful. In conjunction with the structured feedback, I was increasing my use of ongoing feedback to improve my lessons. My observation of
students’ ability to perform tasks and interact with others in the class helped me prepare lessons that would accommodate preferred learning styles and environments.

**Student Needs**

After clarifying my needs for information and support as a team teacher and then exploring feedback in the classroom, I looked more closely at my student needs. I had become aware of some of these needs through my work with ongoing and structured feedback. In reviewing the Metanet entries and work in the IYTP, I saw that many of Claire Stanley’s Metanet responses to my inquiries and comments during the IYTP visit, had led me to other discoveries about my students’ needs. In addition I realized that my readings had also served me in adapting my teaching to enhance student learning needs.

In these two entries, subsequent to the first day of my IYTP teacher observation by my supervisor Claire Stanley, I began to face the reality of what was actually happening in my high school classes without the presence of my team teacher:

**November 17, 1997**

**IYTP Teacher Observation Day 1 Class 2:**
I focus on the subject rather than on the students.

**IYTP Teacher Observation Day 1 Class 3:**
The material was too difficult for the students to grasp. Many students weren’t paying attention and got very noisy. What is my relationship with the students? Do they feel like they have to pay attention to me? I see them only once a week and don’t even know their names or very much about them.

After Claire Stanley’s observation of my third class, I became aware of the fact that without my team teacher’s presence I could not provide the structure needed for many of the students to be successful in the lesson. This may have been due to my reliance on team teachers to provide a co-operative audience and then to evaluate their abilities through quizzes and inform me of their
In the Class 4 observation presented below I normally taught with a young, recently graduated female JTE. On reflection, I noted that my interaction with this team teacher had always been congenial and amiable. Students perceived this energy and in most cases participated in the activities with limited passive resistance:

**IYTP Teacher Observation Day 1 Class 4:**
Great class. High energy, we did a song with strips, I color coded the strips so it would be easier for them. They used Classroom English and were having fun. However, many students worked individually in their groups of four. Each student took responsibility for one section of the song and completed their portion of the task without the help of classmates.

In this example, students were attentive to my instructions and most of the students succeeded in completing the activity. However, there seemed to be resistance to the community learning activities by some individuals.

In the discussions throughout the teacher observation with Claire Stanley, I discovered that I was not establishing a strong enough relationship with my students. As a result of this realization, I began to make incremental changes in my thinking and applied what I understood to be the best approach to solve issues that would arise in the classroom in the months to follow. I was also becoming more cognizant of how a variety of factors influenced the content of the lessons I prepared.

In the next stage of addressing student needs, I began to build stronger relationships with students. I set aside some time during lessons to elicit their needs and opinions about why it is important to study English. I had this discussion not only to increase my teaching presence and get answers to my questions, but also to show that I value their responses. Furthermore with my team teachers’ and students’ help, I received feedback that I could use to plan future lessons to help meet student needs.
I’ve taken a step back this past week and asked questions, provided possible answers and elicited responses (in Japanese and English) as to why it’s important to study English. It seemed very clear that my students needed the content of this discussion to facilitate active learning in my class in the future. During their years of studying English in the classroom, my students have never discussed these issues. What was also interesting was the fact that my Jr. HS classes were the most responsive to these questions. They wanted to, and were able to continue the dialogue at a much higher level (in English or Japanese) than my Sr. HS students could.

Claire Stanley added depth to my context and the desire for students to study in this following entry:

What Rob has posted is a useful piece of data gathering from his context about the place of English within the Jr HS and Sr HS curriculum in Japan. Within a prescribed situation such as public education, it is true that ss actually get very little L2 learning and that their "needs" are dictated by the educational institution and the secondary school context to a certain degree. Then there are what their "needs" are in relation to becoming world citizens and people interested in people of other cultures.

So Rob's answer that the ss may not actually have a "need" is based on the fact that there may be no individual burning need other than the overall one for all HS and Jr HS students which is learning in general, facing a subject matter, figuring it out, and learning something in the process - and then feeling good about oneself as one learns.

I have quoted from Shute to further elaborate about why it is important to study English, or for that matter any other subject:

“You are not engaged so much in acquiring knowledge as in the making of mental efforts under criticism … A certain amount of knowledge you can indeed, with average facilities, acquire as to retain; nor need you regret the hours you spend on much that is forgotten, for the shadow of lost knowledge at least protects you from many illusions. But you go to a great school not so much for knowledge as the arts and habits; for the habit of attention, for the art of expression, for the art of assuming at a moment’s notice a new intellectual position, for the art of entering quickly into another person’s thoughts, for the habit of submitting to censure and refutation, for the art of indicating assent or dissent ingratiated terms, for the habit of regarding minute points of accuracy, for the art of working out what is possible in a given time … for discrimination, for mental courage and mental soberness. And above all you go to a great school for self-knowledge.”

(Shute, 1993, p. 26)

I now believe that development of self-knowledge is vitally important when studying languages, and it demands an emotional and spiritual investment to become a more successful learner. As a
teacher, I developed a better understanding of the importance of affective engagement in class as I guide the students’ personalization of their learning experience.

This insight of raising the importance of my students’ emotional needs as a means of engaging them was a crucial realization for me in my teaching career. Strangely, as a learner, I was very much aware of the need vested in this emotional state to fully gain from the experience, but the connection to my role as a teacher was not completely achieved. As a teacher, I began to become aware of how I could include my students’ thoughts and feelings within the classroom. With this realization, I attempted to reach more of my students through a greater variety of strategies.

One of my strategies was to address my over-reliance on classroom materials, which I used and developed for my classes. After reading Sylvia Ashton-Warner’s thoughts on classroom materials below, I began to realize the importance of students’ personalization of their learning experience:

“I say that the more material there is for a child, the less pull there is on his own resources. ... I don’t believe in shiny polished books. The shine and the colour should be supplied by the child’s own imagination.”


Prior to this insight, I created a vast amount of classroom material and handouts for every lesson I taught. Little did I expect that this preparation time could have been far better spent finding out how to get students to release their creative powers in the classroom, rather than my own. This quote lead me to conclude that the lesson would meet the needs of learners, provided the task is attainable with respect to the linguistic challenge and that students are engaged in learning through personalization of their experiences.

After four months of reflective journal writing, I was approaching a better understanding
of the dynamics of the classroom. In entry 1:102 below, Claire Stanley describes how we, the members of the Metanet group, have evolved in our thinking. We initially started monitoring our own actions and responses and slowly shifted towards observing student responses in relation to the changes that we as teachers had made to classroom activities and atmosphere:

> 1:102) 11-MAR-98 9:05 Claire Stanley
> … I could see the steps they followed and had some data as to what the ss were actually doing in response to what they as teachers had set in motion. This is an extremely important step. As many of you may recall, and if you have been printing these entries out, you need only turn to the first months of entries to see that most of the entries were focused on what you were doing as teachers with very little if no focus on what the students were doing in response to the situations you had created.

Later, Claire Stanley again asked our Metanet group about student needs, and emphasized how feedback is the key to finding out how to respond appropriately to enhance their learning experience.

> 1:111) 29-MAR-98 20:56 Claire Stanley
> My big question is - how do you know what it is that the students need to know? So it's not just a question of adding in pair work to make it more SIT like - it's really looking at learning and how to respond in a way that really helps students - that really makes a difference. And maybe what you did was just right - but as you say, you don't really know if it helped because you didn't do feedback.
> You have data there - can you analyze it.

This next entry allowed everyone in my Metanet community to grow together in our work as she commented on our reflective journals and the next stage of student observations that focused on student learning. Claire Stanley also summarized a number of possibilities that teachers can become aware of, by fostering richer classroom environments:

> 1:142) 16-MAY-98 11:47 Claire Stanley
> Teachers are so on the spot and have been trained to think of their lesson plans and what they are doing themselves, that it is a big shift and is often met with resistance to get them to start looking at the students more than themselves. But this is happening now where in most of your entries I read more data as to what the ss are doing and how they are responding. A final new "edge" to explore for you is to begin to focus not only on the doing and responding, but also on the learning. Can you begin to observe and report on when a student has "got it" or when she is not "getting it"? As far as
my feedback on your learning of reflection, I can begin to say "By George, they've got it!" Just about every entry now has a complete reflective cycle in it - and I sense that you are not working at it - that it is part of your thinking now – that it is working for you - that it's making a difference - and for several of you, the reflection-in-action piece is picking up where you are beginning to translate the reflective cycle consciously into the moment in your classes.

It gives you what is there and connects to you the Teacher, the individual SS, their Context (culture and school), and the ss' Relationships with one another, and the Material or level of the language the ss are working with that you are giving them (T, SS, C, R, M). By analyzing the “results” of any reflective inquiry through the framework I present in this last sentence, you can know what is responsible for what has happened and whether you can have any impact on changing it - you can then take a step to create a solution from the source of the issue and/or just accept it as a given and not "your fault" or anything you have succeeded or failed at. It's a really interesting and different way of seeing your responsibilities.

Rob's entry 1:140 connects to this kind of analysis. He had observed the ss, the data of their behavior and decided that with some of the ss, the context/culture piece of the framework could help him find a solution to ss response in class. He decided to talk to the HR teachers as part of the C analysis, and observed positive results from this intervention. This isn't the only intervention he's going to use, but he is aware of the framework I mentioned above (I think I mentioned it to most of you during the visit) and may also work on M, SS, and T. He may need to be adjusting his Material to fit ss' interests and linguistic ability, he may need to connect more with individual SS to let them know he cares about them, and he may need to continue to work on his T presence, persona, role.

So once you've done the reflection, analyzed the situation, and generated possible responses, you might also ask the question of where the key responsibility or locus of the situation actually lies. If you have observed totally consistent behavior from several different classes of ss, and you have done almost the same thing consistently, then you might conclude that it is you, the T, who needs to change. However, if you do the same thing more or less with different classes and get VERY different responses from each class, you know it isn't you, but the class and so R or M may need to change.

The entries that I selected for this section represent how I became aware of my relationship with my students. During this time, I was able to reach my students on an affective level as shown by these entries. In other sections of this paper I wrote about how I began evaluating students’ learning by taking over the responsibility of preparing and marking tests and how this made me more able to adapt to cognitive needs during class time. By knowing what students could and could not do through test results and their responses in the classroom, I was more helpful to their learning when I reviewed language targets and monitored students’ language output.

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2 Metanet entry 1:140 can be found on page 44
Until recently I focused on the target language and did not acknowledge the deeper emotional and personal needs of my high school students. At this age, students are developing into mature individuals who are beginning to question and explore their identities. These students have so much energy, just waiting to be focused and directed into productive channels as presented in The Teaching Presence:

“To be effective, a teacher must love the essential qualities of the age group with which he or she works and see these developmental qualities not as obstacles or irritations but as opportunities for growth and connection. Knowing the limitations to perspective, skill, or self-mastery inherent in the young, a loving teacher feels a deep respect for the essential humanity.”

(Kessler, 1991, p. 11)

Another example illustrating the need to know students comes from The Power of Compassion written by The Dalai Lama. His experience demonstrates that compassion for students’ lives and their future (and not only for their examinations), allows for a more effective learning environment. Many of my students wanted to reach out for attention and acceptance from me, and their peers. As an example from my IYTP, one student who rebelled in the first few weeks of classes became very close to me after I spent some individual time with him after school. Although at first he was apprehensive about coming to see me during his free time, later I learned that he also sought out another teacher for help. Not only did he improve his studies, he became happier and more able to contribute positively in class.

By providing this level of attention, I began noticing positive changes throughout many of my classes as my presence and relationships grew stronger. Students now knew what I expected from them in the classroom and that I was trying to improve the quality of our lessons. The following quote from Darlene L. Stewart reinforces my beliefs and experiences:

“establishing a supportive relationship with my students that demonstrates that I respect my students and love teaching, has in general made my classes become pleasant and constructive
I asked a student during a feedback session at the end of a class: What do you remember or like most about an English lesson? His answer was, “The most important factor for me is to have an experience that is fun and interesting.” What is striking to me is that throughout my education I also remember little about the content of my lessons. However, I do remember times when the teacher told personal stories and encouraged us to express or act out our creative thoughts. These moments brought a special life to the class. The interaction of people on a level that was personable, compassionate, relaxed and interesting, encouraged me to study and appreciate what I was learning.

Keeping this in mind, I now know that the importance of positive affective experiences encourages students to continue their desire to study and look for answers to the questions they have. Not only is the classroom a place for students to be led to possible solutions to answers, but also a place in which individuals learn to think and make discoveries on their own or in community. When outside the classroom, students will continue this search and will happily do so if there are affective factors to perpetuate the desire for self-knowledge. Then, as an affirmation, they will share these exciting discoveries with others, much like my experience in writing this paper.

Summary

By reviewing my journals, reflecting on Claire Stanley’s Metanet responses and other opinions from my readings, I learned that I must first address students’ affective needs. I discovered that I needed to improve my relationship with students and that this required time and reflection. By initially addressing my students’ needs for studying English, I was able to influence more students in an affective manner. I further elicited and observed student feedback to assess
their language ability. In the process of writing this paper, I realized that the students’ affective needs are as important, if not more so, than their cognitive needs. When meeting both needs, these factors reinforce each other, adding to an engaging learning experience.
“establishing a supportive relationship with my students that demonstrates that I respect my students and love teaching, has in general made my classes become pleasant and constructive learning environments.”

(Stewart, 1993, p. 100)

CHAPTER 3

DISCIPLINE AND CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT

This chapter continues to illustrate and detail the importance of reflective teaching journals. In reviewing my journals, I noted that discipline and classroom management were areas that were critical in my work with the high school students. In the following sections, I will introduce each topic and present relevant journal entries, which depict problems and personal insights into these issues.

**Discipline**

During the process of writing and reviewing my journals, I discovered that it was not only important to tell students what acceptable behavior in my classroom was, but to also have homeroom teachers and faculty support my teaching needs to ensure that there would be consequences when my instructions were not followed.

In the high schools where I taught in Japan, I saw a variety of disciplinary issues arise. These issues ranged from students fighting, cheating on tests, students sleeping in class, and a notable lack of respect for teachers and other students on numerous occasions. In the first high school I taught in with a Japanese team teacher, I was told not to disturb sleeping students, and that these students had probably been studying late into the night and/or might be attending a juku (a cram school to help them with their studies and tests). Although it may have been possible that some students had studied late and were tired, I had a difficult time with the concept that it was
acceptable for students to sleep in class. When I awakened these students, I felt as if I had invaded their privacy and made them uncomfortable in front of their classmates. I soon realized that it was the role of the JTE to deal with such matters, and that it was best for me not to take action. This was difficult for me to accept.

During my IYTP teacher observation with my supervisor, the issue of discipline became one of primary importance. In the beginning of the observation period, I found it difficult in many cases to organize familiar tasks and have students follow my directions, possibly due to the fact that my team teachers were not present while I was teaching, as requested by the supervisor. As a partner in team teaching, it became obvious that I had assumed the role of the English activity provider, while my Japanese colleague was both the enforcer and the caretaker of proper behavior. I realized that although I had to adapt to my school and team teachers, I needed to follow the teaching beliefs I held. Under these teaching conditions, it was impossible for a majority of my students to get value from the lesson. My passivity on this issue reached its limit. It was now time to act.

The entry presented below records the first time when team teachers were asked by me to speak to my students about how they should behave in class, especially during my IYTP teacher observation period. The team teachers in turn informed the homeroom teachers about my need for discipline in the classroom when teaching on my own.

1:43) 29-NOV-97 2:42 Robert Taferner
Between Day 1 and Day 2 of my IYTP teacher observation, there was an interval of over a week due to scheduling. During this period, I informed my team teachers of my need to have students listen to my instructions and become more disciplined. The homeroom teachers spoke to their students and my classes became more manageable.

My IYTP Teacher Observation Day 2 journal briefly describes some insights about how students’ classroom discipline could be improved by greater awareness of students’ moods and
interests.

December 3, 1997
IYTP Teacher Observation Day 2:
Day 2 Class 1: With class control I am focused and can manage the class more effectively. However at times, I don’t have them all following my explanations or instructions. How do I get all of them following along the lesson with me so that my energy reaches throughout the class? Laughter focuses everyone. When I personalize the experience students listen and harness their attention to concentrate on the task.

My teacher observation experience with my supervisor helped me to redefine my beliefs about the role of discipline in the classroom. Previously, I had had a superficial authoritarian understanding of discipline and how it should be implemented. I believed that if I could provide entertaining lessons with lots of activities that students would not disobey my instructions. If they did, I would deal with them by focusing attention on that student and possibly scolding them if they became too difficult to handle. Now I believe that in order for me to teach effectively, students must listen to my instructions carefully before language activities. To accomplish this I must have their attention. Getting students’ attention during my teacher observation involved forces outside the classroom, namely homeroom teachers. I found that repeated utilization of homeroom teachers was very helpful with recurring discipline issues. I found that once I had students attention, I had to ensure that I could introduce and deliver an interesting learning experience that kept them engaged in the language tasks throughout the lesson.

The next few weeks my classes were unusually responsive and during the remainder of my IYTP teacher observation, I was more clearly able to observe students’ learning and their interaction with me. Later, at the beginning of my classes after the winter holidays, I wrote a class outline in English and Japanese, that listed the classroom objectives as well as the behavioral requirements. With expectations made clear, classes became easier to teach as students understood what was required to facilitate their learning.
Months later however, in a new high school, I was teaching without a team teacher, I again experienced students not complying with my instructions during an activity, as illustrated by Claire Stanley’s comments below:

1:149) 25-MAY-98 19:59 Claire Stanley
Rob has a similar situation in that ss are not on task and he is trying to figure out why. He has asked a student who claims that the activity is too easy for him. I'm wondering if the Process of the activity is what is challenging - if for HS students there is simply too much freedom and they don't know how to discipline themselves. The variation that Rob used to have ss across the room created a new dynamic to the process, brought the activity in line, and kept ss in English and on task. So, I'd say that Rob still needs to look at challenge and engagement - and setting boundaries in the classroom to keep it in English. Any easy variation might be to simply make the time limits shorter, Rob. - giving them five minutes to do the activity and giving an extra grade for those who do it all in English might be enough of a change in process to get them going. Maybe they don't see how doing the activities fits into their schema for tests and grades. So Rob has many things to explore both on the Material level (how to make things more linguistically challenging) and on the process level (how to make it more engaging with consequences).

After reading Claire Stanley’s remarks above about my disciplinary problems in the classroom, I began to explore ways of changing the process by adding and enforcing consequences when work was incomplete or copied. I also made sure that all work was graded and recorded. For each class, I would check to make sure that students had completed their dialogue practice and homework. If they did not comply with my instructions during class time, I gave them the option of spending time with me after school and completing their work at that time. I again asked homeroom teachers for their assistance in enforcing my rules and consequences, which proved to be necessary and successful in making the students accountable to me. Students now interacted with me on a one-to-one basis as they submitted their work to me after school. By having students ask questions and complete their work in my presence, I could more easily address my students’ affective and cognitive needs. At times, however, my teacher’s room was filled with students scrambling to finish their work so they would not miss their club activities. I concede that I enjoyed the influence that I had over them, but it was to their benefit and showed that I cared about them, which I believe
many students acknowledged and respected.

The quote below summarizes my beliefs as I struggle with discipline in the classroom for the benefit of the students’ learning environment. In The Teaching Presence, Kessler describes a positive image of discipline for teachers in this manner:

“Teachers who seek a classroom that invites the full humanity of their students may find it useful to think of discipline as a means of creating a ‘sanctuary’ or ‘sacred space’—a place of refuge and immunity from disrespect and abuse of the heart and senses common to contemporary life.”

(Kessler, 1991, p. 8)

Creating this vulnerable and safe environment requires firmness from the teacher in setting limits, and allows students to express themselves creatively in the classroom. My observations in the classroom have helped me notice that very few acts of disobedience occur when appropriate consequences are in effect, and students are allowed freedom to express themselves and personalize their learning environment. Jack Millett expresses this view in his following Classroom Management Discussion entry:

12:42) 02-JUN-98 13:55 Jack Millett
… I was struck again, of how important it is for the teacher to have a clear sense of what is acceptable and unacceptable behavior in her/his classroom. If the teacher is clear then it makes it easier to respond to unacceptable behavior in a matter of fact way and apply the appropriate consequences. The teacher doesn't need to get so hung up in emotions/irritation. She/he can simply state it is not acceptable and here is what must happen.

I can also relate to Sylvia Ashton-Warner’s statement on the suppression of creative ability and its influence on the issue of classroom behavior. Here she writes about her insights when teaching Moari children in New Zealand:

“There is only one answer to destructiveness and that is creativity.”

(Ashton-Warner, 1963, p. 96)
Students should be allowed to express themselves creatively within the content of the lesson. Creating an environment that challenges and supports their creative efforts surely leads to better discipline and happier students.

Summary
In this section, I have discussed the main disciplinary issue of students not following along with my instructions during an activity. Writing and reviewing my journals helped me discover that it was important to explicitly tell students what is acceptable behavior. I further asked homeroom teachers and faculty to support my teaching needs, which ensured that there would be consequences when my instructions were not followed. Learning more about my students’ interests also helped to enhance students’ creative abilities and allow me to facilitate a positive learning experience while maintaining classroom discipline.

Classroom Management
In this section, I distinguish classroom management from discipline by focusing primarily on my explanations and structuring of classroom activities. In the discipline section the focus was on acceptable student behavior and institutional support of my teaching needs.

Claire Stanley’s impartial evaluation of my classes during my teacher observation without my team teacher helped me realize for the first time that there were problems with the way I managed my high school classes. I realized that when I tried to incorporate the approaches, methods, and techniques that I had learned during my first SMAT summer at SIT, I could not initially manage my high school classes effectively. For example, when students were required to work with a partner or in groups, instructions in English were rarely listened to. It was during my
first day of the IYTP teacher observation that I realized that my ability to maintain students’
attention and classroom management strategies without my team teacher were not that successful:

1:39) 22-NOV-97 1:52 Robert Tafener
Claire’s visit this past week has made me more aware of my influence in the classroom without my
team teacher. Three of four of classes were very disruptive. This experience has altered my focus
on the components I include in my lesson planning and classroom management strategy. With a
team teacher, I have been catering to the responsive students. On reflection, these students are
primarily those who are highly motivated.

A number of questions were immediately raised: Why aren’t other students responding? Can they
respond? How do they see me as an authority figure? Do they understand me? What is their
motivation to respond? What external factors are involved?

From this entry, it was clear that in this particular class I was not able to hold the students’ attention
without the assistance of my team teacher. On reflection, the team teacher provided the Japanese
authoritarian influence, and I provided the activities in my classes. Rarely did we individually play
both roles, however, it did come as a surprise when I found out that I had so little control over my
students.

I realized that when I presented topics in my high school classes with a team teacher, a
majority of the students listened and some students usually began a conversation with me. During
lessons with one of my team teachers, he stood in my shadow and observed students, which
ensured that they obeyed most of the time. He insisted on silence when they got too noisy, and
occasionally punished students that misbehaved. Students were accustomed to authoritarian
control by the JTE, wherein they could be made to obediently comply with demands placed upon
them. Under these conditions, my lesson plans appeared effective.

After thinking about my teaching situation over the winter holidays, I returned to school
refreshed and ready to address the many classroom issues which I had uncovered during my IYTP
teacher observation. Over the next two weeks of teaching, I made changes such as reverting from
group work, which I had usually used, to whole class activities and relied less on handouts. These modifications to my teaching, described in the following entry, were successful in widening my influence upon my team taught classes and helped my presence have a larger impact on the students’ attention.

1:61) 17-JAN-98 2:52 Robert Taferner

What happened? 12 hours after arriving back to Japan from my vacation in Thailand, I was in the classroom. It was my one of my best days of teaching. I was relaxed, attentive to ongoing feedback in the class and not tied to a mass of materials in order to feel that the students and I had learned and accomplished something of value. One of my strategies in the classroom is to reduce the amount of preparation in terms of handouts and expand on areas that the students’ need for a fuller understanding by utilizing the 4 skills. I've also been using the blackboard to help keep the students focused. The blackboard is keeping the students’ eyes fixed on the language/drawings, which appear to address disciplinary issues. I’m using the board for spelling, sentence formation and pronunciation practice. Even ALM has come to the rescue when students’ energies needed to be consolidated.

Effect: Not using handouts frees my creativity and has allowed my students and I to be in the moment. Students appear to be more responsive and enjoy themselves to a greater degree.

What’s next?
1. Continue experimenting with ways of expanding my range of activities requiring no handouts, which keep students engaged and on target.
2. As of next week, all of my classes will be receiving a class outline depicting Class Description, Objectives, a Marking Scheme, Classroom Behavior, and an introduction to Journaling in both English and Japanese. My reason for providing this outline is to give students’ clear objectives and responsibility for their learning. In addition, it helps me with classroom behavioral issues. This reinforces the theme of engaging and empowering the learner, and allowing those who want to learn, an opportunity to excel.
3. I have also taken more responsibility in preparing quizzes and marking them. My knowledge about testing allows me to create quizzes, which will minimize the amount of poorly designed materials and set some parameters that can encourage positive backwash in the future.

In this reflective journal entry, it is clear that my relaxed state of mind fostered many insights into my teaching methodology and provided a better learning environment for my students.

Reflection on how I could improve my teaching during the initial months of my IYTP indicated that my beliefs about how a classroom should operate were far from being actualized. I believe that as a teacher, students want to learn English, and they want to learn it in an environment that is student-centered and enjoyable. In order to accomplish this, I needed students who would readily follow my instructions with little disciplinary problems. This was not always the case, as
discipline issues arose frequently. I assumed my Japanese counterparts had the training and the experience to adequately evaluate students’ learning needs, and could provide both students and myself with the proper guidance, which would be needed to prepare engaging activities for the class.

Another turning point came when I suggested that I would take over the management of all of my high school classes, with my team teachers’ approval. They agreed with my suggestion, provided that the students take a series of quizzes during the term. For a clearer understanding of my expectations in the classroom, I wanted the students to be more aware of how they should interact in order to make the time spent in our classroom as rewarding as possible.

It was to my surprise that when I prepared and proposed the use of course descriptions to explain my classroom objectives, my team teachers had never even considered preparing such a document. It is now my understanding that course descriptions are not given to most high school students in Japan. The reason may be that most high school courses are teacher-centered and rely solely on the textbook which is chosen for the class. The material in the textbook represents the total sum of knowledge that is expected to be memorized and tested, therefore further explanation about the course is not necessary. Since my classes did not fit the standard classroom approach that was being used in other classes, I felt the necessity to provide a detailed description of requirements, classroom activities, and objectives. I believed that both the class description and my work with student feedback contributed to a heightening of student attention.

Altering the classroom, however, was not an easy process, since the overall responsibility for the classes resided in the Japanese Teacher of English (JTE), not in the Assistant Language Teacher (ALT). I had to be careful and supportive as I suggested changes in the classroom. The objective I was trying to achieve was a break from the strict teacher-dominated environment,
which inhibited students’ freedom to voice their thoughts and feelings. I wanted to make changes
to order to help create a learning environment that was enjoyable and interesting to students and
teachers alike, while still maintaining classroom order. In the “What is Effective Classroom
Management?” folder below, I summarized high school background and classroom management
strategies that I was implementing:

12:1) 17-JAN-98 16:31 Robert Taferner
I'll start this discussion with the Classroom Management Strategies I've been trying to implement
over the past few months at the high school where I am teaching.

**Background information:**
1. I teach Jr. and Sr. high school in a team teaching arrangement with Japanese Teachers of English.
   Often ideas conflict in terms of how much disruptive behavior is acceptable by the students as well
   as the approach to language teaching i.e. Grammar Translation vs. the assortment of techniques
   that I've picked up to foster self-discovery on the part of the learner.

2. All classes are graded. The students who do best on tests are put together into one class. The
   lowest levels generally have more behavioral issues to deal with. My high school is rated below
   average in academic ability in the Osaka area.

3. The Japanese teachers have never involved the students in open discussions about the usefulness
   and reasons for studying English.

4. Students study 6-7 periods of English a week. One period (50 minutes) is with me in an Oral
   Communication - Listening class.
5. Class size: 28-44 students per class.

**Classroom Management Strategies:**
A. Use written Feedback Surveys to encourage students to express their needs and report the
activities that they enjoy doing. I can also assess students’ abilities in the 4 Skills by having the
students rate the level of the tasks in the lesson.

B. In my team teaching situation, my colleague took the responsibility of preparing and marking
the quizzes. Often the students copy from one another. Some students don't bother writing quizzes.
The quizzes themselves often don't test any particular skill and frequently even lead to more
confusion. As of January, I'll be scheduling and preparing the quizzes and marking them. Taking
this step will allow the students to feel more focused, which may lead to increased confidence and
growth in their abilities.

C. Pep Talks in English: Japanese is used for clarification when needed. The students want to
learn more about the potential uses of English and are curious about the world. They need to
discover why they are studying English and how best to develop their skills. After giving these
talks in December, many of my students felt more motivated and have encouraged me to continue
these talks in the future.

D. Seating Plan in English. I'm beginning to use the seating plan to call on students for answers,
encourage disruptive students, move energy around the class, and keep students attentive and
accountable to me when I start using their names. I can also quickly assess which students need
more help and mark the class list when students are continuously disruptive. After class, the notes that I have written on the seating plan during the lesson help me identify and evaluate needs, abilities, and problem students.

E. Use of the Blackboard. The blackboard is a great visual aid. I use it to focus students by writing the lesson objectives, remind the students about the classroom English that will be useful, and work which is planned on the target structure, etc. It also gives them another medium to utilize when trying to grasp the day’s lesson.

F. Develop a Class Outline that describes the content, requirements of the students and marking scheme. I was surprised to find out that this isn't part of their normal classroom procedure. This should provide the class a focus and give students concrete objectives. Students will have a clearer idea about how they will interact and excel in class. I’m giving my students this outline this coming week.

G. Use fewer handouts. This will encourage me to be more attentive to the students’ ongoing feedback and add depth to the materials. In addition, more students may increase their engagement in the lesson because they are directing the flow of the lesson by expressing their needs and experiences.

When these changes had been implemented in my high school classrooms, I began to get and maintain student attention. Of the strategies listed above, all except item D (using a seating plan) were successful on a long-term basis. The seating plan worked until the homeroom teachers changed seating arrangements periodically without telling me. This resulted in embarrassing encounters when I addressed students with someone else’s name.

After making the above adjustments in less than a week, dramatic changes took place throughout all of my high school classes, which were taught with a team teacher, as presented in the following entry:

1:66) 24-JAN-98 4:49 Robert Taferner
While I am talking, students are listening to me. While others are responding to questions there is silence. What’s going on? In a class of 28-44 students, it’s hard to believe.

Changes that have taken place since Claire’s visit include:

1. I've given students an outline of the course, their responsibilities, and how they are going to be evaluated.
2. I'm using board work extensively.
3. I've taken control of class planning, quiz setting and marking.
4. I'm listening and reacting to the students on-going comments as I am managing to direct them towards the target language in an engaging manner.
5. Classroom English is helping students control their language input and how I’m interacting with them.
6. I’m trying to have the class work together on error correction.
7. Students think I now know what their names are and can call on their participation at anytime via the seating plan.
8. I write down the lesson objectives on the board prior to the lesson and read it to the class.
9. I’m having fun.
10. I’m slowing down. I stand silently and wait for attention.
11. My team teachers are astonished at the changes that have taken place and are allowing me a lot of freedom.

In the following entry, I continued my investigation of the many positive and dramatic changes in my classes:

1:80) 04-FEB-98 21:15 Robert Taferner
I'm continuing to look at the changes that have taken place in my classes.

**What happened?:** My students are more responsive in class.

**Why?:**
A. I have figured out that I'm definitely giving them more responsibility and that their actions are accountable to me. I now mark the homework and class quizzes, and do only whole classroom activities with no small group or pair work, to assert my presence.

B. As a teacher in a team teaching arrangement I have also taken control of what the students are being exposed to in the classroom, including presentation of the day’s target language, quizzes and homework. I am taking more responsibility as a facilitator, teacher, and evaluator. As I grade the students’ work that is submitted, I'm better able to evaluate:
1. What common errors they make.
2. Which students can and can't produce English. This knowledge will help me predict and prepare for future needs of the learners as situations arise.

C. By using fewer materials (handouts) I'm more responsive to students’ personalization of the target language. I'm thinking of which direction to take next with the target language or to put it on hold and follow another line of thought. I'm thinking of energy levels of the class, i.e. move to individual questions around the room; consolidate students by having them look at the board; do a listen and repeat drill for pronunciation, etc. I'm using the class-seating plan to call on students. By being more present, most of my students notice and want to be part of the positive energy this involvement generates.

**What's next?:**
- Continue controlling the direction of my high school classes with my team teachers’ approval.
- Continue using less material, expanding and recycling it. Improve scaffolding of the lesson with emphasis on personal experiences (students and mine).
- Use grammar books and develop a deeper grasp of how to present grammar points and direct students’ auto-correction. From the assignments, I intend to single out some common errors and present them in class.
- Begin thinking of creating a final test that will address some of the errors that are made and that will have positive backwash on their learning, confidence, and attitude towards the English language.

It seems that by being more present and giving voice to my students that their behavior and overall engagement has improved.
It is difficult to isolate exactly which factors made the biggest impact on my classes because every change I made influenced all of the parameters involved. It appears that by giving students clarity in my expectations and boundaries for their behavior, numerous positive classroom management issues were resolved:

1. During this time, I felt well rested, confident, and pleased with my work.
2. My teacher presence was getting stronger.
3. Student-Teacher relationships were improving.
4. Students were more responsible to me for their activities in the classroom.
5. I could more clearly focus on their language level and needs.

In my new high school, I was now teaching students on my own without a team teacher in the classroom. The entry below depicts some of the initial issues I encountered as I modified my teaching to this new environment:

1:118) 20-APR-98 19:51 Robert Taferner

**Background (first lesson with each class):**

Week One with my new classes:
I'm doing introductions, giving western names (name tags), and classroom English. I'll be doing this lesson 18 times in total (I have 11 more to go). During the lessons, I observed and made adjustments to the following:
- sequencing and delivery of my lesson plan;
- using silence and positioning of myself in front of the class to get attention;
- moving between individual, pair and group work according to the energy levels and ability of the students to concentrate and be on task;
- using silence and puzzles to keep students wondering and engaged in the activity;
- using group leaders to help facilitate activities.

For next week, I want to work on timing and student engagement.

**What happened?**
I noticed that during pair and group activities the amount of time to complete activities differed from student to student. I had difficulties keeping students who finished early, engaged in English related tasks.

**Possible reasons why?**
These students feel that they have completed the task and now have free time, and think that it's OK to engage in any activity that they want to. It's possible that at the beginning of the school year students are testing limits. Another possibility is, that, in their other classes, unrelated activities may be acceptable.

**What’s next?**
Plan ways to make students responsible during the times that bridge the gap between tasks. Some possibilities for consideration include:

- Find out what other teachers are doing in their classes;
- Think about using these students to help slower students, get them to:
  A. Write their answers on the board, and / or
  B. Expand on what they have done with follow-up activities.
- Make a rule regarding the activities that are acceptable if students finish early;
- Get them to help me prepare for the next activity. Since student fatigue is also a consideration, I must be aware of the implications of what I'm asking these students to do and how it'll influence students in future lessons.

In my second week of the term, in my new school, I was able to set my classroom expectations to refine my classroom management strategies utilizing ongoing student feedback.

When I began observing student-teacher, student-student interactions, and their language abilities, I was able to refine my teaching effectiveness in the classroom as the following entry indicates:

1:124) 24-APR-98 3:44 Robert Taferner
I just finished my second week of teaching at my new school. I'm getting used to the workload and schedule. It's feels good to be in control of my own classes without a team teacher and get respect from the students and staff.

**This weeks focus:** Using group leaders to help facilitate activities.

**What happened?:** I told students to "Get into your groups, team leaders come here". Within a minute tables were organized and team leaders were listening to my instructions. Most students understood the activity (Dominoes - sentence building game), went back to their groups, explained the activity in Japanese, and began.

**Problems:**
1. Some Team Leaders used Japanese when English would have been fine.
2. One Team Leader didn't fully understand and returned to her group confused.

**What's next?:**
When calling on the Team Leaders and using them to facilitate, allow for more practice before letting them return to their groups. As the students are learning the language and activity as the same time, I should make the exercise as clear as possible and then tell them to show others through example. During my next class, I will tell the students we have an English only policy and remind them that Classroom English must be used to clarify misunderstandings.

At this point of my classroom research, I was focusing on the facilitation and sequencing of activities, ensuring that students were kept on task. In the following entry, Claire Stanley is commenting on the depth of my search for possible clues as to why something occurred in the classroom and the steps to take in the future to improve my teaching.

1:127) 25-APR-98 12:01 Claire Stanley
For Rob, I am responding to his entries #118\(^3\) and #124\(^4\). In his entry #118, Rob talks about having ss working in groups and what to do when some ss finish ahead of time.

What was really interesting for me to note was the difference between Rob's two entries in relation to reflectivity. In his #118 entry, he asks questions about working with ss who finish before the others, but doesn't come up with too many ways himself to respond to the situation. In his #124 entry, he talks about the team leaders and getting them to initiate and control activities for their groups/teams. Entry #124 is so much more complete - he has a very specific situation and he has very clear ongoing feedback to report as to how the different students responded to the task of being a team leader. Out of the specific data of what the ss actually did or were doing, he got ideas of what to do next when setting up the team leader situation. So often I find that the closer I can observe what the students are actually doing in response to what I've set up, the better I can begin to "see" what the next step is for me to improve the situation. So I encourage each of you to include specific data from your students in your entries both in your own reflective journals at home and in what you post here on Metanet.

From Claire Stanley’s entry, I learned that by closely observing what students are doing at each stage of an activity, I could increase my ability to provide a “What’s next” for the students to do in the moment. This kind of advice allowed me to more quickly target solutions by watching and learning from the students, and to best suit their affective and cognitive needs.

In the last few weeks of this Metanet project, Claire Stanley asked us to concentrate our journals entries on a limited number of issues we wanted to explore. I decided to focus my research on homework that I gave to students, modeling activities, group and pair work, class participation and linking activities as part of my classroom management development, as described in the next entry:

1:136) 10-MAY-98 19:20 Robert Taferner
This being our last few weeks on the Metanet, I would like to concentrate my observations and journals on student involvement and the progression of activities in the class.

**What happened?:**
There were a number of instances in the past few weeks where students didn't comply completely with my instructions.

**Possible reasons why?:**
In this new teaching context, I am still learning about the schools and the students’ culture and expectations, and what kinds of classroom involvement they have had previous exposure to.

\(^3\) Metanet entry 1:118 can be found on page 40
\(^4\) Metanet entry 1:124 can be found on page 41
What's next?:
I have to adapt my expectations with students/schools to utilize their learning potential. After understanding this, I can direct and guide them towards a system that makes best use of the situation.

Examples of classroom management issues:

**Homework:** Homework was being completed by about 50% of the students. I learned that teachers generally assign very little homework and that students don't have much time to complete it. The students may have forgotten their homework. Last year the same problem was noted. In the future, I will use free time in class to work on homework, collect, and grade homework periodically. Furthermore, I will think about giving homework only when there is a high probably of completion and use homework as the previous week’s review and/or as a warm-up for the following class. This shift in thinking will allow me to assign homework for those who want it and do it, and allow others to have access to the answers which may help build their abilities. This view will also help me deal with this issue in a “win-win” manner.

**Modeling activities:** During information gap activities, it seems that most students don't listen or pay attention to the modeling of the activity and instead try to solve the exercise by themselves. At times during the first of a series of lessons my directions weren't as refined as they should be, so students occasionally got confused. Some aspects of the language were unclear and students needed more help prior to the practice stage of the lesson. In the future, when setting-up role-play, I will demonstrate more clearly by first doing a teacher-student model and then a student-student model. After modeling, I will assign pairs and partners.

**Group/Pair work:** When I ask students to do individual work they often pair up and complete the task. While in groups, when one student has been chosen to write or summarize the exercise the other students daydream or start talking in Japanese. I think the key to working on tasks in a group is, to give each student responsibility to do the task. During pair work I should patrol the aisles giving students help if they need it and for students that are not doing the work increase my presence and inhibit behavior that is not acceptable. In most cases, I want students to share what they learn with their classmates without copying. In the future, I'll continue to observe group dynamics and assess how tasks are best completed. By closer observation of the students, I'll better understand how to facilitate a smooth progression of classroom activities. I’ll also be including follow-up activities and extension exercises or homework, for students who finish tasks earlier than others.

**Class participation:** In a particular class, I had some of my third year students not completing any of the written work given in class. The students not participating are trying to test limits of behavior. Last week, I informed the homeroom teachers that some of their students weren't doing their work in class. I also asked them to send those students to my office to complete their work before their next class. I will continue using the resources of the school to help with this problem and make it a point to grade students’ work during each class. I will also investigate ways to harness the energy of the class by personalizing the lessons’ content and make the class more fun, challenging and achievable.

I continued to concentrate my observations on student involvement and the progression of activities in the class. At times, students did not follow my instructions during classroom activities or complete homework assignments. I found that a successful strategy for improving participation
was to ask homeroom teachers to help enforce my requests of the students. Afterwards, more students maintained their attention on English activities in the classroom and the homework completion rate also improved.

As seen in the following entry, I was also becoming aware of how the culture of the school and homeroom teachers’ influence has an impact on my classroom management. I began questioning students’ classroom performance and developmental skills such as note-taking. I also had frequent conversations about our classes with other English teachers and homeroom teachers which helped me adapt my lessons to best work within the system and still maintain my beliefs about how to teach effectively.

What happened?: I walk into class; students are noisy, taking their time assembling. Some students eagerly await the lesson while most are busy talking to their neighbors. I wait until they are ready. This pattern repeats throughout the class as I change activities. I also notice this pattern in other Japanese classes in my school. For example, I told students to clear off their desks and get into groups. The junior 2’s do it immediately, while my junior 3 and senior year 1 students act as if they don't understand and wait for an appropriate amount of time and then all move at once to comply with the instructions.

Possible reasons why?:
1. Students need time to adjust to new seating arrangements, talk to friends about what they just experienced.
2. Acknowledge students’ fatigue.
3. Many of the students need to express themselves to let off steam. Doing exercises in which they aren't truly interested (exercises that don't challenge and engage the students at their level) is unrewarding and they need a distraction.
4. Students dislike being controlled by others including and especially the teacher.
5. Although students understand my instructions (move your seats etc.) they need to make their presence felt via passive resistance and only start doing what I want as a group.
6. Students want personal attention from me. I have also noticed that when groups are already working together and independent within a large class, motivation to do the work is very high, and switching tasks is much easier with smaller groups.
7. Students need to be given responsibility for their actions, otherwise, there is no reason to sit still and wait for instructions.

What’s next?
1. Make plans to observe other classes in the school. Look at ways in which teachers are using their presence and linking exercises together for a guide to help understand what students are
accustomed to and best use that knowledge for the planning of my future classes.
2. Try to develop lesson plans that incorporate the emotional needs of the students.
3. Work on ‘attention getters’. As I make a transition from one activity to another, factor in emotional and personal reasons for the students to be interested in what is being presented.
4. Give students time to adjust their seats, process what's being presented, and allow for periods of chaos as part of the process.
5. Include current events for students to personalize their experience.

In the What’s next? section (point 1) of the entry above, I indicated that observing teachers throughout the school would help me understand the school culture and students better. Therefore over a two-week period I observed six classes taught by Japanese teachers. My intention was to watch the manner in which they interacted with students and managed their classes. I observed three English classes taught by three different young women, and a math, science, and social science class taught by men in their forties.

In two of the English language classes I observed, I had difficulty in assessing what the students gained from the experience. The amount of English spoken was minimal. English actually used in conveying a message aside from a grammar-translation aspect was zero. In these two classes, a second year junior high school class, and a first year senior high school class, students appeared to have very little personal contact with the teacher. All interactions were initiated by the teacher and reluctantly followed by the students. In these classes, the teachers failed to develop a friendly relationship with the students. The teachers solely delivered the content of their lessons and expected students to follow their lectures with little interaction. The interaction was primarily between the teacher and the students about a particular grammar point or vocabulary item with no affective involvement by either the teacher or the students.

The third English class I watched was a second year junior high school class. The teacher was continuously allowing student questions, using some group work, and used about fifty percent English in all interactions. The students were energetic and enjoyed the experience. In this case,
the lesson incorporated students’ experiences, elicited thematic language and grammar that was included in the scope of the learning objectives.

In the second year junior high school math class I observed, it was clear that the teacher understood the material he was teaching and was confident in presenting new concepts and engaging students as they worked with problems at their desks. The students had respect for this teacher, listened to his anecdotes, and personalized approach in helping them learn. The atmosphere was very different in the case of the science teacher’s third year junior high school class. The teacher was nervous and presented incorrect answers to problems on the board. The students responded with laughter and unruly behavior. After this observation, I remained to watch the next period’s social science class. Here, the teacher turned these unruly kids into students who respected the teacher and fellow students; they interacted openly with not only the teacher but with other students as well. Students’ opinions were being heard and acknowledged during open discussions. In a class of thirty-five adolescent students, I was impressed. The teacher was captivating and empowered his students to express their views.

Observing these students with other teachers helped me realize the potential I have in shaping their learning environments. I learned that my students needed constant attention and personal inclusion and affirmation of their responses throughout the lesson. I also discovered that students interacted differently in each class. Students that behaved well in my class were disruptive in others, and visa-versa. From these teacher observations, I ultimately learned that my students’ feelings and affective needs come before the content of the lesson and that it was up to me, the teacher to find the right combination to support their learning.

As I continued to reflect on my classes, I could grasp possible solutions from many sources as seen in many of my entries. Getting Claire Stanley’s feedback helped me to focus on
areas that would yield the greatest probability of discovering proactive changes in my classrooms.

Claire Stanley pointed me in the direction of observing closely what students were actually doing, again affirming the direction that I had taken in my journals.

12:34) 17-MAY-98 18:28 Claire Stanley
Really interesting to get all of your 'attention getter' ideas here in this folder - a good inventory for future situations. I also wanted to comment on Rob's 1:140 entry in the reflective journal. He has some great observations about why ss may be getting off task in his classes. Two of the reasons that struck me in his list were the one about how he could change activities faster once the ss were broken down into smaller groups (Japanese group culture norms?) and the other was about personal attention and responsibility. This entry therefore, kind of connects to what I wrote in folder #9 for Rob. I think that the personal contact makes a huge difference - your idea of walking around the room and making contact with the small groups. This would be something really interesting to "test out" and to "track" to see what level of difference the more personal contact in a small group made.

Summary

This review of my IYTP reflective teaching journals revealed that in order to improve my teaching, a systematic plan of action was necessary to help facilitate good classroom management. It was during my teacher observation with Claire Stanley that I first became aware of some classroom management problems I had to address. During this project, I researched the impact of numerous adaptations in my preparation and delivery of lessons. I investigated and proposed modifications in the manner in which I had taught with my team teachers, addressed student participation in the classroom and made modifications to classroom materials to ensure that each student had completed their own work.

The Metanet folder, "What is Effective Classroom Management?" also proved to be a valuable resource in addressing problems and possible solutions. I believe that it is the teachers’ responsibility to create an atmosphere where students have the opportunity to become engaged in a learning activity in a manner which neither inhibits individuals’ freedoms to express themselves,

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5 Metanet entry 1:140 can be found on page 44
yet does not interfere with the learning of others in the classroom.

In order to further my insight on classroom management styles, I also observed other teachers’ classes in the school. From this experience, I further realized that the more effectively I can deliver lessons with clear instructions in an engaging manner, the more efficiently superior classroom management objectives can be reached.
“you need only claim the events of your life to make yourself yours. When you truly possess all you have been and done ... you are fierce with reality.”

(Palmer, 1998, p. 29)

CHAPTER 4
CONCLUSION

By coding my Metanet entries and further investigating the following five issues, team teaching, feedback, student needs, discipline, and classroom management, I discovered the enormous value of using reflective teaching journals as a means of continuously improving my teaching. Through this explanation, I saw clearly that observing students’ reactions and adapting to students’ needs were the most important indicators to monitor the effectiveness of my teaching and the students’ learning. These insights have served me well in working on my teaching.

Through my work with the reflective journals I realized that most of the time, I was focusing on delivery of the subject matter and not my students’ learning. Due to my background in audiolingual techniques and the accumulated teaching materials I had developed over years of teaching, I had followed a style of teaching that alluded to language skill development with me in control. I began to see the need to give control to the students but found my balance between teacher control and student initiative to be not always successful. Balancing student-teacher control, allowing for more student input and adapting to students’ ongoing feedback became one of my main areas of study.

After I began writing journals, I realized I began asking myself questions such as why are the students reacting the way they are at any particular moment in the lesson?, and how can I best encourage development of their skills?, asking these kinds of questions and sharing my views and
beliefs with my colleagues about classroom situations has lead to a more fulfilling understanding of my role as a teacher. In listening to others describe their classroom stories, and then explaining my relevant issues, I no longer felt alone when making decisions that effected my classroom. When seeking change and improvement in my teaching, I now rely on reflective teaching journals to ground my thinking and explore new avenues in approaching any particular classroom issue.

Through the process of writing reflective teaching journals and keeping track of my thoughts and actions, I have been able to implement new strategies that more readily facilitate student interaction and flow during the time we spend together. Taking an honest look at my beliefs and ingrained patterns of actions has led to a number of professional and personal challenges. It has not been easy selecting the most appropriate way to deal with the issues that I have encountered. However, looking back, it has been satisfying to know that the work I have done may have benefited my classrooms, and colleagues with whom I have had contact.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


