Practical Student Self-affirmation

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Abstract

This research paper focuses on student peer interactional relationships in a tertiary level classroom setting in Japan. The research is based on the use of one piece of technology, Microsoft PowerPoint, to illustrate student peer interactional relationships during presentation tasks throughout the 2015 Spring Semester. The application of the particular software used in this research is of little importance, in that any piece of software could be used to investigate student interaction. The important findings of this research indicate that students can be made aware of their self-affirmation through an application of sociolinguistics and an introduction of critical pedagogy that encompasses a significant reduction in the influence of the traditional 'teacher' role to the benefit of student empowerment. The role of the student changes from being the passive object to that of a more active Subject role, as that of the 'teacher,' or better termed 'facilitator,' dispenses their traditional paternalistic, authoritative Subject position, in favor of being one that helps to bring about '…an outcome (as learning, productivity, or communication) by providing indirect or unobtrusive assistance, guidance, or supervision,' on the part of the 'facilitator,' as it is defined in the Miriam-Webster dictionary (2015). For students to adopt a more active role requires a change in study habits, which requires more effort. However, this adheres perfectly to the Kyoai College motto; 'You can develop your ability though it might be hard' (Kyoai, 2015).

Background pedagogy

The traditional structure of the teacher-focused school environment in Japanese education, with the teacher as the Subject and the students relegated to that of being the Object, is reinforced by the gatekeeping control held over them through the dominance of testing as an evaluation tool, the design of classrooms, classroom dynamics, exercises, and pre-determined textbooks and lesson plans. Students typically follow textbooks in linear progression, with teacher-focused tasks, pair work tasks, project tasks and group interaction. Recently different teaching styles have been introduced into many classrooms, including blended learning and flipped classrooms, but more often than not, they remain teacher-focused in terms of control, authority and power.

In my previous papers (Deadman, 2013 and Deadman, 2014), I detailed the application of sociolinguistic theory to practical teaching strategies at the tertiary level. The basis of this theory originates from the research of the Russian psychologist Vygotsky, who made claims about the relationship between language and thought, and between the individual and society (Mercer, 2000). Vygotsky described language as having two main functions; as a communicative or cultural tool we use for sharing, and for jointly developing knowledge. Vygotsky pointed out that children, or actually any learner, differ in their responsiveness to guidance, instructions and opportunities for learning.

Under this theory, teachers should assign tasks that students cannot do on their own, but which they can do with assistance; they should provide just enough assistance so that students learn to complete the tasks independently and then provide an environment that enables students to do harder tasks than would otherwise be possible. In the context of adults, peers should challenge each other in order to support collaboration and success. By measuring the difference between the original independent capability of each learner and what they are able to achieve when given some guidance and support, education could make a more useful, dynamic assessment of these learners' educational prospects and needs. This difference is each learner's *Zone of Proximal Development* (ZPD). Vygotsky said instruction is only useful when it moves ahead of development,' drawing learners just beyond their existing capabilities to 'stretch' their intellect and so help them to develop (Mercer, 2000).

Mercer (2000) develops Vygotsky's idea of language as a community or cultural tool in his notions of 'community' and *communities of practice*. Mercer details what 'communities' of members are in terms of; *a shared history of information and expertise*, on which members can draw and which can be passed to new members, *a collective identity* of sharing knowledge, aims and experiences of doing things together,

reciprocal obligations in responsibilities towards each other and access to each other's intellectual resources, and a *discourse* in that language can be reshaped as communicative demands emerge. Mercer (2000) proposed that for a teacher to teach and a learner to learn, they must use talk and joint activity to create a shared communicative space, an *Intermental Development Zone* (IDZ), on the contextual foundations of their common knowledge and aims. In this zone, which is reconstituted constantly as the dialogue continues, the 'teacher,' whether an actual teacher or more capable English speaker, and learners negotiate their way through the activity in which they are involved. As with Vygotsky's original ideas of the ZPD, the concept of an IDZ still focuses attention on how a learner progresses under guidance in an activity, but in a way which is more clearly related to the variable contributions of both teacher and learner.

However, both Vygotsky and Mercer still retain the central, paternalistic, authoritative figure of the 'teacher' that fails to address the real self-affirmation of the 'student' or 'learner.' As mentioned above, Vygotsky (Mercer, 2000) considers his theory within the notion of how children differ in their responsiveness to teacher guidance, instructions and opportunities for learning. Mercer, still pedestals the teacher within the student's learning process. Whilst evoking the importance of sociolinguistics, it is essential to consider the work of Paulo Reglus Neves Freire, a Brazilian educator and philosopher and a leading advocate of critical pedagogy. Whereas sociolinguistics is principally concerned with the psychological aspect of learning and using a language, even within traditional schooling methods, Critical pedagogy expands on this notion as a philosophy of education and social movement that combines education with critical theory.

Building on a more critical nature than sociolinguistics, Freire (1970), states that a careful analysis of the teacher-student relationship at any level reveals its fundamentally narrative character. This relationship involves a narrating Subject (the teacher) and patient, listening objects (the students). Freire states that the contents, whether values or empirical dimensions of reality, tend in the process of being narrated to become lifeless and petrified. The teacher talks about reality as if it were motionless, static, compartmentalized, and predictable. Or else he expounds on a topic completely alien to the existential experience of the students this task is to 'fill' the students with the contents of the teachers narration or contents which are detached from reality, discontinued from the totality that engendered them and could give them significance. Freire declares that any situation in which 'A' objectively exploits 'B' or hinders his or her pursuit of self-affirmation as a responsible person is one of oppression. Although

this may sound ‘aggressive’ when thinking about university education, it can be viewed as such that if a teacher who fails to address realistic student needs, or a peer student exploits another student through unfair support or bias interaction. This fact necessitates a more active, positive approach to learning, rather than students positioning themselves and teachers positioning the students as objects, ignorant of the facts ‘presented’ by the authoritative paternal figure, namely the teacher. However, students do ‘know things’ and it is imperative that the teacher, or better ‘facilitator’, enables a situation whereby students learn to trust themselves and take responsibility for their own learning.

As Freire (1970) points out in his description of traditional classrooms, “Narration leads the students to memorize mechanically the narrated content. Education becomes an act of depositing, in which the students are the depositories and the teacher is the depositor” (p.73). Freire’s notion is summed up by his term of the ‘banking’ concept of education, in which the scope of action allowed to the students extends only as far as receiving, filing, and storing the deposits. Freire stated that banking education maintains and even stimulates the oppressive society as a whole:

A) the teacher teaches and the students are taught;
B) the teacher knows everything and the students know nothing;
C) the teacher thinks and the students are thought about;
D) the teacher talks and the students listen – meekly;
E) the teacher disciplines and the students are disciplined;
F) the teacher chooses and enforces his choice, and the students comply;
G) the teacher acts and the students have the illusion of acting through the action of the teacher;
H) the teacher chooses the program content, and the students (who were not consulted) adapt to it;
I) the teacher confuses the authority of knowledge with his or her own professional authority, which she and he sets in opposition to the freedom of the students;
J) the teacher is the Subject of the learning process, while the pupils are mere objects.

However, Freire notes that knowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other. Education must begin with the solution of the teacher-student contradiction, by reconstructing the poles of the contraction so that both are simultaneously teacher and students. It is imperative that teachers fully understand and apply the lessons learnt from ‘banking education’ in their

lesson plans, dialogues and interactions with students and other teachers.

Freire (1970) declares that the empowerment of students in decision making represents itself as a pedagogy of humankind. He further states that pedagogy which begins with the egoistic interest of the oppressors and makes the oppressed the objects of its paternalism, itself maintains and embodies oppression. Teachers are not necessarily oppressing their students in an obvious or apparent sense, but particularly in Japan, the status and respect given to the 'teacher' or 'sensei' adds weight to the idea of paternalism. Historically, Japanese education has been associated with a high degree of discipline and as van Wolferen (1989) claims, perpetrated a mass production of rules. Detailed by the Japanese federation of bar associations, or *Nichibenren*, such rules have included "…how pupils must sit, stand and walk, and to what height and which angle they should raise their hands," and that "It is clear that many of these rules were designed on the principle that more rules mean fewer disciplinary problems" (van Wolferen, 1989, p.92). This is also reflected in the submission of Japanese people, to formally recognized power, or the mentor system in widespread use in Japanese culture, which is often found at all levels of education, and in sports clubs, businesses, and informal or social organizations. The relationship is an essential element of Japanese seniority-based status relationships, similar to the way that family and other relationships are decided based on age. As such, students naturally comply with the system in place that is a 'norm' in society and one that is difficult to even contemplate not adhering to for most Japanese people. For the average student not to consider the 'teacher' as a mentor in the formal sense, and instead adopt their teacher as a 'facilitator' may be an abstract concept. There is a clear difference in definition between Japanese and Western culture and this affects how students and teachers see themselves and others within the classroom setting which may reinforce the seniority-based status relationship based on age, experience, ability or position. Subsequently the decision-making process in the classroom will be affected by the naming of the stakeholders within the class and this has to be transmitted to the students if the teacher wants to divulge their authority or power to the students.

Background setting

This study was conducted at Maebashi Kyoai Gakuen University. The University (Kyoai, 2015) states that its motto is "Students-centrism" with an educational philosophy of "Harmonious coexistence" being put into practice in college management and classroom situation, with the recognition that the main feature of University is "absolutely students." By this motto, the University expresses the notion

of “Harmonious coexistence with community,” it is the intention to create the University together with students and that they should be at the center of community as leading players to improve “their own college” (Kyoai, 2015).

The University has promoted five basics of education to share as a philosophy with the students (Kyoai, 2015), which include an “All-round education based on Christianity” to establish individuality and be a member of society proactively and proudly to contribute to creating “Harmonious coexistence society” and embody coexistence in it. In addition, “Cultivation of human resources with international mind” has the aim of giving this philosophy back to the society, especially the local area. An “Academic spirit and perspective” is important for students to have ability to find problems, seek solutions, and promote the resolution as well as to be human resources with internationality when working in international society. To “Educate people with wisdom” is a tenet that the University aims to provide education that puts emphasis on the ability to utilize knowledge and skills, and make a judgment needed to survive in real life. Lastly, the University aims to “Provide opportunity for proactive contact with and experience in the real world”, in that it is important for the students to have a variety of experiences through the contact with international and regional society while in college to make it real “potential” (Kyoai, 2015). Within these five basics of education, the students are also expected to “…grow as human resources who work actively beyond the boundaries of local area and in international society by seeing connection between regional society, the whole of Japan, and international society with looking at regional life” (Kyoai, 2015).

The students themselves must also be considered within the fundamentals of sociolinguistics. The Kyoai students in this study are by and large homogenous in ethnicity, socio-economic background, and age. The only apparent difference is gender. As such the student body represents quite a strong speech community, who use language in a mutually inclusive way. This is supported by the predominate number of students who are local citizens and have lived and grown up in the local area all of their lives. In addition, the students display a strong sense of community of practice, as outlined above. They are predominantly all high school graduates and most have entered Kyoai immediately from high school graduation. They share similar everyday activities in terms of schooling and private life, with most students living locally or within the prefecture. Students can therefore be placed within quite similar social networks that reinforce sameness in their group identities.

Considerations of technology, student cooperation and self-affirmation.

Thinking at a more macro level, *The Programme for International Student Assessment* (PISA) is a worldwide study by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) of 15-year-old school pupils scholastic performance in mathematics, science, and reading. The PISA report *Strong Performers and Successful Reformers in Education: Lessons from PISA for Japan* (PISA, 2015) asks the question "How is Technology Changing Demand for Human Skills?" The report states that technology can change the nature of work faster than people can change their skills. It states that innovation is central to market economies and it is impossible to imagine many of the new occupations that are likely to exist in a decade's time. Central to technology is the computer. By characterizing the kinds of work computers do well, it is possible to describe the work that will remain for people in the future, the skills that work requires and the way that computers can assist people in performing that work. This will without question apply to our students of today, who may not actually work in a job that they envisage at present. However, the skills we can introduce them to now, and allow them to develop and responsible for will prepare them for such eventualities. Our responsibility is not necessarily to instruct students in how to use the various types of technology, but help them to communicate in English in order for them to be able to use such technology with other language speakers, and accordingly seek from and provide support to other users.

Considering this information and aiming to conduct research that is both practical and useful to the students themselves, this paper focuses on one particular classroom presentation tool, that of Microsoft's 'PowerPoint' program. In this study, student presentations were analyzed, the majority of which were made from PowerPoint. A few instances of the use of Apple's 'Keynote' were recorded. There are a wealth of presentation software programs available to both teachers and students, but PowerPoint is the most popular application in use today. According to quora.com, as of March 2014, PowerPoint had a 95% of the presentation software market share, with installations on at least 1 billion computers.

PowerPoint presentations consist of a number of individual pages or *slides*. The *slide* analogy is a reference to the slide projector. Slides may contain text, graphics, sound, movies, and other objects, which may be arranged freely. The presentation can be printed, displayed live on a computer, or navigated through at the command of the presenter.

Although there is a wealth of other presentation programs including *Keynote, PowToon, Prezi, Prezntit, SliderRocket, Clearslide, Google Slides* and *Slide Dog* to name some of the most popular and frequently used, PowerPoint still maintains a

monopolistic market share due to the ubiquitous Microsoft Operating system. However, although other programs may offer better features, downloads, add-ons, and ease of use, I had to consider the validity of the programs for use within the classroom and at home, in students self-study and homework. The computers available to students and teachers at Kyoai University, already have PowerPoint installed, and many students rely on these to complete work and study. Some students do not have direct access to a PC at home and as such may not be able to access alternatives to PowerPoint and cannot download additional software packages at college. However, students were notified at the outset that they could use whatever software program they wanted to present their assigned tasks, as long as the classroom computer or media console would support that program in the presentation time.

Of more importance is the fact that the assigned tasks set throughout the courses were not tests of the actual PowerPoint presentation per se, but a tool within student's presentations and how they used it to present their ideas related to the theme of their topic. Solely making a presentation based around a loose collection of slides and nothing else would indicate a poor presentation. This is where the role of peer support, evaluation and grading, and peer teaching would be utilized to help students grow as both presenters and teachers to each other, fulfilling this research paper's aim that by focusing on ambiguous instructions, practical peer learning would take place, replacing the need and reliance on the teacher as the guide and sole evaluator, with the teacher acting more like a silent project leader that allows the students to discover for themselves how to make a successful presentation and increase their own self-potential, or self-affirmation.

PowerPoint construction

With regards to the actual files or software presentations the students would develop, I decided that my role as the facilitator in the class was one of minimal support or help in these particular classroom tasks, in order that students would seek help from each other. Simply asking me for help would not actually benefit the students greatly apart from getting an immediate technological or presentation design fix. Such direct interaction, or rather intervention, would negate the purpose of this study and ongoing student learning empowerment.

As such, technological and presentation construction would be decided and supported by the students themselves. They would need to decide for themselves what was suitable for their tasks, and seek and get peer help and support. This would be supplemented by unobtrusive evaluation of each other's tasks in the presentation

grading process, which has the dual function of actual grading but also dispensing ideas to each other, and generating a mutual understanding of what constituted an appropriate or better presentation.

Educational research into the use and uptake of technology in the classroom is a mixed bag of support and criticism. Knutzen and Kennedy (2013) relate how teachers can be grouped according to the strategies they use, either using a transmission teaching strategy or transformative teaching strategy. Echoing traditional classroom practices, a transmissive teaching strategy is based on reproduction of taught material, resulting in surface learning. In contrast, a transformative strategy is based upon a perception that learning is knowledge constructed by the student. This method is designed to engage students in actively constructing their own knowledge in order to develop a deeper understanding of concepts. Learning activities should help students recognize frames of reference and use their imaginations to redefine problems from a different perspective.

Awad and Alkaraki (2013) looked at the attitudes of EFL students towards using computers in learning English at public schools in Jordan. They found that students agree that computers allow them to increase the skills and creativity, whatever the background of the student, including age, gender, or computer literacy. Students held a positive attitude toward using computers in the classroom, which led to a feeling of personal empowerment and learning opportunities, reflective of critical pedagogy and self-affirmation.

Markee (2001) discusses the diffusion of innovation in language teaching and states that typically teachers are implementers, students are clients, curriculum and materials designers are suppliers, but points out that in practice these roles are not mutually exclusive. It is quite likely that the same person will play different roles, sometimes simultaneously, sometimes in varying times during the course of a project.

However, a word of warning comes from Sergeant (2001) who warns that "while there seems to be little doubt of the potential of IT (Information Technology), it is difficult to specify the nature of the new learning opportunities" (p.240). Sergeant further states that "students, who are the recipients of CALL, are the least consulted during the decision-making process. They are the ones who are most disadvantaged if CALL is not effectively implemented" (ibid). Writing in 2001, Sergeant suggested that due to the additional complexity of the computer medium compared with normal classrooms activities, a high standard of teacher expertise is essential, otherwise CALL becomes a form of 'electronic baby-sitting.' It is imperative to consider the 'teacher expertise' in that any computer related tasks are appropriate, manageable, promote student self-development and growth, foster peer interaction, learning and teaching, and

are not just a form of electronic baby-sitting. The end result must be that the students value the time and effort they used in constructing and presenting their ideas, and that it has improved their skills both in English communication and use of technology to aid their English communication skills.

PowerPoint Evaluations

The evaluation of the student presentations needs to be considered in both a quantitative and qualitative sense. In quantitative terms, it is necessary to dissect the actual presentation files and slides to show how students improved their designs, skills and abilities over the three or four tasks. Even in such a short time frame of one semester and a few tasks, student presentations could be analyzed in terms of technical complexity. In addition, an observational qualitative angle of the processes of the student's construction of PowerPoint files in preparation time allowed me as the teacher-researcher to witness unobtrusively how students learnt from, taught and supported each other in their ongoing skill development.

Quantitative Evaluation

In terms of the student and teacher evaluation of the actual presentations, six criteria were used during the actual presentation time, namely *presentation design, voice, eye contact, classroom management, interest* and *activities/discussion*. However, as a researcher and with an interest in the use of technology, I wanted to focus on the actual PowerPoint presentations constructed by the students and ascertain whether they showed development in style, content and construction during the flow of the semester with subsequent tasks assigned. The aim was to establish whether the students, through peer learning and cooperating during class time, homework, and through peer evaluation during the presentation, were actively learning from each other and applying it to their presentations throughout the course, effectively making better PowerPoint examples.

The criteria actually used for comparison by the students for the presentations included those that focus on actual design (*slide creation, slide transitions,* and *pictures, clip art and background*), content and English (*content, mechanics*), and technology skills (*technology connection*), as seen in Table 1. *Content* is focused on the accuracy and logical order of the information within the presentation. *Slide creation* and *slide transition* evaluate the organization, flow and layout order of the slides. These criteria are supported by *pictures, clip art and background* which evaluate the still and animated images incorporated. Mechanics refers to spelling and grammar accuracy, and

the fact that the text is in the author's own, not copied from the Internet or word by word from a text. *Technical connection* tests the users understanding and manipulation of the technology used in the presentation. The criteria are scaled 1-5, with 5 the highest score possible.

Table 1: Average class task scores

		Slide creation	Slide transitions	Images	Content	Mechanics	Technology connection	Total
B5	Task 1	2.7	1	4	3.5	2.2	2.8	16.2
	Task 2	1.1	1.3	2.4	1.6	1.8	1.5	9.7
	Task 3	2.7	1.8	3.7	3.5	2.3	3	17.0
	Task 4	2.7	2.3	4.7	3.8	3.2	3.7	20.4
	Average	2.3	1.6	3.7	3.1	2.4	2.8	15.8
B3/4	Task 1	2.8	1.2	4	3.6	2.5	2.8	16.9
	Task 2	2.9	1.2	4.1	3.8	2.5	2.9	17.4
	Task 3	2.4	1.1	4	3.5	2.4	2.5	15.9
	Task 4	3.0	1.4	4.2	3.8	2.8	2.9	18.1
	Average	2.8	1.2	4.1	3.7	2.6	2.8	17.1
Adv List	Task 1	4.1	3.1	4.1	4.2	3.1	3.9	22.5
	Task 2	4.2	3	4.3	4.4	3	3.9	22.8
	Task 3	4.2	2.9	4.5	4.2	3.4	4	23.2
	Average	4.2	3.1	4.3	4.4	3.5	4.3	23.8

Table 1 shows the average task scores for each class; *B5* (Spoken English), *B3/4* (Global Issues), *Adv List* (Advanced Listening), based on the evaluation criteria. The B5 class is typically comprised of first-year students, the B3/4 class of second-year students, and the Advanced Listening class of fourth-year students. The table shows the average score for each assignment in each class, based on the progression of the class in the semester. Table 1 shows that in all three classes, the average score attained over the six criteria rose from the first task to the last. The 'B5' class showed the highest increase

with 4.2 points, compared to 1.2 points and 0.7 point score increase, for the B3/4 and Advanced Listening course respectively. This highlights a general progression in student presentation skills and better awareness and understanding of both teacher and more importantly peer expectations of what a good presentation should be. Without specifically and purposefully stating my expectations of presentations, students constructed their Task 1 presentations based on their own personal expectations. Being asked to observe and grade each other's presentations from Task 1 through Task 4, students were consciously aware of what other students had produced in comparison to their own presentations, and what would be expected of their subsequent presentations. This level of peer learning, awareness and cooperation, as they sought help from each other, signals students can actively manage their own skills, knowledge and technical abilities through observation and cooperation. It is not an absolute necessity that the 'teacher' directs tasks. Students, as per Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development, can actively overcome learning and ability obstacles and become better learners, teachers and peers to each other, and themselves. More explicit for the students themselves was the level of peer feedback and cooperation, rather than being instructed what an ideal presentation should be. Noticeable praise was given to groups that produced and conducted better presentations, through higher grading, applause and praise in class, and technical help sought from those students in subsequent presentation preparation, which was part of the syllabus. In addition, successful presentation strategies were borrowed from and given to each other throughout the tasks, as communal and cooperative peer learning teaching.

Breaking down Table 1 further, it can be seen that;

1. As noted above, the average points garnered by each class rose from the first task to the last task, signaling a rise in evaluation of the presentations made.
2. The highest evaluated criteria for class B5 was *images* and for B3/4 was *images* and *content*. However, the Advanced Listening class secured average points of 4 or above for four of the criteria, namely *images, slide creation, content and technology connection.* This indicates a higher skill level amongst the older students as expected. These students have probably had more exposure to such software technology.
3. The lowest evaluated criteria for all three classes was *slide transitions*, scoring an average over all tasks of 1.6 points (B5), 1.2 points (B3/4), and 3.1 points (Advanced Listening). This reflects a poor level of linking ideas or lack of technological awareness. It is not an apparent function in the toolbar on the

PowerPoint software, and students may never have encountered it. As an animation or transition tool it may enhance the viewing aspect for the audience.

4. The biggest change in average points, from the first task to the last task, was markedly different amongst the three classes. The B5 class recorded larger increases than the other two classes in terms of *slide transitions* (1.3 points), technology connection (0.9 points) and images (0.7 points). However, the Advanced Listening class recorded an increase of 0.1 to 0.4 points in four categories. In addition, the B3/4 class recorded an increase of 0.1-0.3 points in all six criteria, without any one criteria being significantly more improved than the others, reflecting a general improvement in all categories.
5. The only decrease in average score over all tasks was recorded for the Advanced Listening class, which saw a fall of 0.2 points for *slide transitions.*
6. Although the Advanced Listening class displayed a gradual improvement in scoring over the three tasks, both the B5 and B3/4 class showed one task scoring lower than the previous task(s). In the case of the B5 class, Task 2 scored lower than Task 1, and the B3/4 class showed the lowest score for Task 3.
7. The lower score on Task 2 for the B5 class is significant in that this task was very poorly scored compared to the other tasks. The average score across all four tasks was 15.8. However, Task 2 sored at 9.7 points, which represents a 6.5 point decrease in presentation complexity according to the criteria, a fall of at least one point per criteria. Subsequently, a 7.3 point increase was recorded for Task 3, reflecting an improvement in the audience's evaluation of the presentation complexity.

Qualitative Evaluation

A qualitative observation of small group interactions requires more focused purposive samples to better understand peer interactions, based on the researcher's prolonged engagement with the students themselves and through first-hand direct observation of them.

The following case studies explain the process of constructing of PowerPoint slideshows and how they were able to improve the quality and design of their PowerPoint presentations, but also how they learned or made the connection that PowerPoint doesn't make a presentation, it is simply a tool to be used in a presentation. The main focus should be on engaging the audience, which is much better performed through more appropriate activities involving the audience or student, rather than solely having a passive, receptive, non-learning environment. However, by focusing on the

ambiguous, in other words limiting my input or help which makes other tasks and instructions, and PowerPoint itself not being so user-friendly in its complexity of functions and toolbars for the average students actual need, students sought out practical peer learning to support each other and improve their efforts.

As detailed above, Both the B5 and B3/4 classes were given four separate tasks to be presented during the first semester. The Advanced Listening class was given only three tasks, as the second task continued over several weeks as the student presentations were much longer in length than the other two classes, principally due to the nature of the course and the ability of the student's English. In the case of the B5 and B3/4 classes, the first presentation tasks were to make a self-introduction on an individual basis. The other three tasks were based on the themes in the class textbook. In each task, some class time was used in the designated computer rooms in order for students to actually construct their PowerPoint files and more importantly, as per the aim of the research of this paper, to allow or to foster peer interaction and support amongst the students. Forcing students to construct their PowerPoint files as a homework task wouldn't allow students as a class to collectively support each other. They may not actually socialize with each other as a class outside of these particular classes and many only meet once a week for these classes. This would defeat the purpose of student interaction and support, as they may not have been able to ask each other for help, may have forgotten their query by the next week and actually foster separation of tasks and pair work. Individual working on tasks doesn't create a community of practice as observed by Mercer (2000) above and as per Freire (1970), the setting of a task that basically prohibits student interaction is akin to the teacher actively choosing and enforcing their choice, and the students passively complying.

In all three classes, regardless of English ability or exposure to English study at Kyoai, the students themselves chose class leaders without my prompting. This is perhaps a function of how Japanese society often operates, with the need to have a designated leader. In the absence of a recognized teacher or senior member that is typically reflected in the submission of Japanese people to formally recognized power, as mentioned above by van Wolferen (1989), the students naturally complied with the system in place that is a 'norm' in society . As such, they adopted the next best thing, which was to select as a class quite quickly the most appropriate natural leaders in the class. In all three classes, male students were chosen as the class leaders for all tasks. The six male students selected as 'leaders' were confident within the class, by nature positive and comedic, positive about learning English and always attentive in class, and

took their new responsibilities in a positive, light-hearted and jovial way. In addition, once selected they took their positions quite seriously for task goals but sought out a very democratic way of making class decisions about the timing, content and order of presentations. Most of the other students seemed very relieved that these students accepted their roles, and deferred to them quite willingly. Not one case of disagreement was recorded over the eight remaining tasks and all classes worked productively.

It is noteworthy that no females volunteered or were selected as class leaders, although they were very supportive within the class. This act of gender deference is notable in that no females put themselves or other females forward in the tasks, perhaps as van Wolferen (1989) notes that this is a reflection of Japanese society in general, "In a country where stereotypes are treasured, emphasis on the established proper roles of women is especially noticeable. It extends to demurely polite deportment, a studied innocent cuteness, a 'gentle' voice one octave above the natural voice" (p.173). In addition, van Wolferen (1989) states that "Superior intelligence is general a liability for girls and women, and must be disguised" (ibid). Although this was written in 1989, over twenty years ago, perhaps these claims still apply and are a reflection that the gender imbalance is still evident. Although the female members support others fully, it is a fact that needs to be addressed. Although Kyoai College promotion of its 'five basics of education' don't actually specify any gender issues, it is an area that teachers need to be aware of in class. As the teacher I could have directly influence the selection of leaders, but within my non-interventionist role, I was reluctant to influence any student decisions.

B5 and B3/4 Semester 1: Small Group Presentations

From the outset of the presentation task, I offered to help out with any technical queries but requested that students seek help from each other as much as possible. Due to their relative inexperience using PowerPoint, most of the students needed help making files, and basic functions such as text composition and importing images.

Interestingly, in Task 2 for the B5 class and Task 3 for the B3/4 class, the average score of the presentations was poor compared to the previous completed tasks, as detailed in the quantitative analysis above. In the case of the B5 class, one reason for this may have been this initial pairing of students, compared to the individual basis of the first task. Pairs may have been less productive in their preparation time as they discussed ideas, or were reluctant to push forward or stress their ideas over their partners too much. In both classes, pairs demonstrated a desire or at least public face of equality, sharing of ideas, modesty and deference to each other. Subsequently, the

presentations averaged over the whole class were much poorer in technical quality than the preceding tasks for each class.

By and large the PowerPoint presentations were rather limited and didn't meet up to my expectations as their facilitator. The presentations already performed by the students had shown basic ability and skill utilizing PowerPoint for presentation purposes. In addition, they had seen my initial course introduction PowerPoint presentation and subsequent lesson presentations within class time. Extensive use of textbook DVDs, listening resources, Internet resources had been observed in the class, yet were not taken up or utilized by the students in this set of presentations, indicating that students were limited in their utilization of PowerPoint design, tools and functions.

Students were asked to self-reflect on their presentations as a self-evaluation exercise, initially in their presentation pairs, and then in plenary. This discussion led on to the next assigned task of the course, and how students could use today's presentations as a springboard for the next presentation. The students as a collective in both classes decided that the next class presentation should be sixty minutes long, with the students having autonomy to make their own presentations.

In the case of the B5 class the students realized that to fulfill this timeframe, they would need to add 'substance' to their presentations. The designated 'leader', Student A, from this project and another student, Student B, began to plan the next presentation for the class, assuming dual leadership together. The students quickly decided that as a number group of ten members, they would need to assume six minutes on average for each speaker, setting the rule that any additional member would necessitate six minutes of extra presentation time. In order to achieve this, they planned on making discussion time, activities, and other pair work or group work tasks as an essential part of their presentation.

The subsequent tasks, Task 3 for the B5 class, and Task 4 for the B3/4 classes were of much higher quality in terms of PowerPoint design and complexity, principally in content and technology connection. This fact related more to the B5 class, than the B3/4 class, as this class saw a significant drop in quality of production and delivery. This can be partly explained by the students being first-year students with an apparent lack of experience in using technology in presentations. Presentations at secondary level would probably have been scripted talks and speech contest entries. With the use of technology and more freedom in speech and less rigidity and control from the teacher, many students may still be unsure of what constitutes a good natural presentation. However, both groups faced a set-back in their general level of presentation quality at one point in the tasks. However, both groups positively reacted to these events and

endeavored to rectify their position. This was a direct result of peer feedback both as a class exercise and as a self-critique. Following the presentations, I simply asked the students to chat about their presentations together, without any input by myself and to think what they would do differently next time, as unobtrusively as possible without signaling my desire for the students to produce and perform better presentations. The students, led by their respective leaders positively reacted to these question and sought ways within their group to address the issues generated by their below par performances.

Both groups exhibited very similar ideas of how to improve on their presentations, principally through timing and content. Independently from myself, the students verbally drew up parameters such as sticking to at least a five minute presentation in the B5 class and ten minute presentation in the B3/4 class. Some of the students initially responded that the timeframe was too long and difficult, but both groups came up with the idea of activities to space out their presentations. This is in itself a reflection that the students realized a presentation made whereby the audience would remain passive receptors is not the most appropriate way to teach or learn. They needed to fill out their presentations with substance, in the forms of tasks and activities, taking the focus away from the screen. The two de facto leaders of the B5 class were also commandeered by all of the other students to teach them how to imbed YouTube videos in their PowerPoint presentations, which turned out to be quite a difficult process. However, once learnt, they seemed to manage editing and adding more videos quite easily. This also indicates a very high level of solidarity, cooperation and harmony within the group, which reflects one of Kyoai's philosophies to be "…a member of society proactively and proudly to contribute to creating *Harmonious coexistence society* and embody coexistence in it" (Kyoai, 2015). In addition, this adheres to Mercer's notion of *communities of practice*, in that members displayed *a shared history of information and expertise*, on which members can draw and which can be passed to new members, *a collective identity* of sharing knowledge, with aims and experiences of doing things together, and *reciprocal obligations* in responsibilities towards each other and access to each other's intellectual resources. Not only did the first-year students use YouTube to make better presentation and relate their presentation to the real world, but they ensured that the other students, their peers, were also able to use it to improve their own skills and abilities. Numerous other examples of support and expertise were shared amongst all the students, with no apparent evidence of any instance of refusing to help each other. In addition, students arranged to meet each other outside of class time to finish off their presentations.

Advanced Listening: Semester 1 Presentations

Unlike the B5 first-year students and B3/4 second-year students, the fourth-year Advanced Listening class students displayed much more computing experience, evident in greater confidence and speed in using computer software. From the outset, several members of the class acted as points of contact for peer support in PowerPoint construction. In addition, the class members had a greater and more natural rapport with each other, both in Japanese and English, and also between the gender divisions. In contrast, some of the younger students of the B5 and B3/4 classes showed some signs of awkwardness with each other that may have hindered some peer interaction and support. This more advanced group in terms of English language ability spoke in a much more casual, but aligned way.

An immediate difference between the B5 and B3/4 students, and these Advanced Listening students was the use of Apple 'Keynote' software to make presentations. Two groups utilized this alternative software to PowerPoint, needing to connect and overcome some initial installation problems, but successfully making their presentations with this alternative software. At face value, the only noticeable difference was style and design from PowerPoint, as the slides looked far more aesthetically pleasing in terms of design, layout, colors and style. However, as the main point of the presentation wasn't just watching slides, the actual time spent looking at the slides was minimal. The main focus was of course the applied presentation, the activities and tasks within the presentation itself.

Following on from the smaller pair/group work exercises previously conducted, two student led projects were set for the latter half of the semester. For these two projects (Tasks 2 and 3), the thirteen students were allowed complete autonomy for their project work, in terms of groupings, themes, presentation timing and structure, tasks and activities, and presentation style. The class divided itself along gender lines and quickly chose a theme and began working together to complete the presentation for the following week. Again, the overriding aim was to foster pair, group and peer interaction and support, as in the other course mentioned above. Due to the bigger group sizes, six in each 'team', the students compiled their presentation using only PowerPoint, rather than on one of the students own devices, meaning that the ubiquitous nature of PowerPoint on operating systems was favored over Apple's 'Keynote'.

The structure of this second project mirrored the first project due to the success of the exercise. Students displayed a ready enthusiasm and high motivation to complete the tasks. Once again, the students divided themselves along gender lines and quickly

chose themes appropriate to their own interests, or shared interests. In fact, the ‘male’ group chose a theme based on the war experiences of an American journalist in the Afghanistan war. In response, the ‘female’ group chose an anti-war peace theme. This apparent theme cooperation was group driven, and reflected a group consensus or flexibility in choices. The cooperation between the groups and amongst the groups allowed for such a linkage in presentation themes. The actual use of PowerPoint was not the focus of the presentation, the theme and subsequent activities and discussion generated would prove far more useful to the exercises.

The overall main findings of the three classes’ presentations are as follows;

The students in the three classes positively progressed in their acquisition of technological skills, cooperation, and presentation skills.

1. The lack of initial knowledge about PowerPoint didn’t hinder any student or group of students, in that every student participated in the tasks and presented their finished product by set deadlines and with at least some form of PowerPoint presentation.
2. The students displayed a great deal of cooperation and peer learning and teaching, akin to utilizing their personal and group Vygotskian Zones of Proximal Development. They utilized previous knowledge of PowerPoint, other software packages, other forms of computers and tablets, with trial and error playing a major role too. Most importantly they were confident enough in their groups to seek and ask for help and cooperation.
3. The uptake of information, knowledge sharing and cooperation indicates that these three sets of students learn new systems quickly and effectively, more so through peer cooperation, learning and teaching. No instance of negative competition was observed in class, and students freely aided and supported each other whenever requested or actively and freely given, demonstrating a great level of sharing intellectual resources.
4. Students have circumnavigated various issues throughout the tasks with minimal input from myself as the course teacher. When students requested help from myself, I endeavored as much as possible without interfering with other students’ work, to direct their queries to each other, rather than me spoon-fed information or help, or quickly correct something.

Conclusion

In her TED.com talk, Margaret Heffernan (Heffernan, 2015), addresses the statement *Why it's Time to Forget the Pecking Order at Work*. She states that

“Organizations are often run according to “the super chicken model,” where the value is placed on star employees who outperform others. And yet, this isn’t what drives the most high-achieving teams.” She observes that it is social cohesion where team members ask each other for help leads over time to great results. This was very evident in the Kyoai student presentations in this study, in which they showed high degrees of social sensitivity to each other and social connectedness to each other. This is also reflective of the ‘teacher’ role being eliminated for this task, initially forcing students to be active Subjects, which they willingly carried over to subsequent tasks.

As such, practical peer self-affirmation positively aided the students in their learning over the short course of tasks. In the case of the three classes, the students displayed a high level of camaraderie, mutual support and respect. No one was singled out or left behind, support was given if asked for and all members were included in decision-making but were given a high degree of freedom in the negotiation of tasks stage. The student interactions at all times portrayed a very communal atmosphere, that adhered to Kyoai University’s avocation of ‘Student-centrism with an educational philosophy of ‘Harmonious coexistence’ (Kyoai, 2015), to the notions of Vygotsky’s zones of proximal development, Mercer’s (2000) notion of communities of practice, and most importantly to Freire’s (1970) stance of critical pedagogy that advocates that students and teachers take the necessary step to self-affirmation. This must be a fundamental concept for class structure, content and management. Self-affirmation relates how individuals adapt to information or experiences that are threatening to their self-concept. Self-affirmation theory contends that if individuals reflect on values that are personally relevant to them, they are less likely to experience distress and react defensively when confronted with information that contradicts or threatens their sense of self. This supports Freire’s (1970) criticism of ‘banking education’, in which the teacher is the Subject and students are passive objects, exemplified by Freire as ‘the teacher teaches and the students are taught; the teacher talks and the students listen – meekly; the teacher chooses and enforces his choice, and the students comply; and the teacher is the Subject of the learning process, while the pupils are mere objects.’ (p.73).
However, at the same time, both students, educators and education bodies need to be aware that this homogeneity typically found in Japanese education settings doesn’t automatically gate-keep those that are located outside of it. As described above, the homogeneity in students of ethnicity, socio-economic backgrounds, age and native language could serve to reinforce the speech communities, communities of practice, social networks and inter-personal level connections. This research has found that students react positively to greater freedom within class and tasks, in a sense a micro

pedagogy of freedom that is reciprocated through peer learning and teaching. This sense of empowerment needs better understood by students so that they see that greater cooperation at every level is beneficial not only for themselves but for any particular group that they may find themselves in.

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要旨

実用的な生徒の自己肯定

マーク・デッドマン

本稿では日本の高等教育現場における学生間の相互作用関係に着目している。2015 年度前期に学生たちはマイクロソフト社のパワーポイントを使用してプレゼンテーションを行った。リサーチはこの時の経験に基づいており、慣れないパワーポイントを使いこなさなければいけないという状況下において、学生たちの人間関係にどのような変化が生じたのかを明記している。ただしパワーポイントのような特定のソフトウェアを使用することが重要なのではなく、他のものを使ったとしても、生徒たちのやり取りを調査するのには十分であったであろう。

本研究における重要な発見は、社会言語学の応用と、教師の役割を大幅に減らすことで学生たち自身に学びの機会を多く与えるような批判的教育学の導入を通じて、学生たちが自己肯定感を高めることができると示している。学生たちに役割を与えることで、彼らは受け身にならず、積極的に学べるようになる。そして教師や進行役は父親のように高圧的に答えを示すのではなく、学生たちが自ら答えを導き出せるような、適切でさり気ないガイダンスを与えることが重要である。

従来の受け身学習から能動的な学習姿勢に転換する為には、学生たち自身が多大な努力をしなければならないが、この姿勢こそ共愛学園前橋国際大学の「大変だけど実力が付く」というモットーに叶っていると筆者は確信する。