小人数グループ中心の授業：教育学における実験（その２）

The Small Group-Centered Classroom： An Experiment in Pedagogy (II)

ランドマーク・レオナルド
Leonard LUNDMARK

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Introduction

This paper will review and update an experiment begun two and a half years ago, in April, 2006, on small group－centered activities in a university English classroom taught by a native speaker of English. The experiment was undertaken as a way of dealing with the problems of classroom management, language production, and student evaluation in classes taught by a single teacher and student enrollment varying from 10 to 70 students per class and in Education, Economics, and Tourism Faculties. The classes have been both required and elective, with the majority of the students being freshmen and sophomores. As the experiment has continued for 5 semesters, it has involved a minimum of 1,000 students to date. Methodically, the experiment is an essay in classroom ethnography akin to Bruce Feiler's *Learning to Bow* (1991), Erin Gruwell's *Teach with Your Heart* (2007), LouAnne Johnson's "*My Posse Don't Do Homework*" (1992) or this author's "Perspectives on an English Speaking Society" (1987). Pedagogically, it follows Paulo Freire's emphasis on "the link between knowing and doing, experience and learning".

The basic experiment involved having each class divide into groups of 4 to 6 students and giving each group a notebook and asking them to record certain data each week. They were given a guide sheet in English and Japanese detailing the data and how it was to be entered. Basically, they were to write the group members' names on the notebook cover, list those names inside, and then record weekly attendance, vocabulary, homework, and in-class quiz and other participation data. The group notebooks were passed out and collected at the beginning and end of each class to insure continuity. The guide sheet also instructed them to choose a group leader and a secretary, although those positions could be changed periodically.

These activities were to be done in English. The vocabulary, vocabulary quiz, newspaper story, and newspaper story questions could be done in either language, but the answers had to be given in English. They would use a textbook (usually the Japanese translation of a non－fiction English book) and do activities as a whole class, but the focus would be on their small group activities. The teacher would teach or do other activities in the usual style for part of each class, but spend the remainder of the class moving from group to group. The rationale was that such a sequence would eliminate most of the teacher talk yet create a stable framework in which the students could communicate with each other. Since the students had already been educated in the Japanese school system with its emphasis on group work and cooperation, they would be able to use that experience and thus would learn better than in a traditional, teacher-centered class.

The Results

How has it all worked out in practice? Overall, three points are very noticeable： (1) they have very poor "soft skills"； (2) they want to make friends； and (3) they will not speak English. Their greatest priority is making friends. "Soft skills" are what author David Shipler calls diligence, punctuality, and a can－do attitude. He describes lower－class American school dropouts, single parents, people with drug problems, and those who have been in prison. His book, *The Working Poor*, did not profile Japanese students from middle-class families. Why didn't these college students have these basic "soft skills"? Punctuality, diligence, and a can－do attitude are pillars of any well－mannered Japanese family. Why couldn't these university students do a small number of clearly

defined tasks for a small number of their peers in a short time and then focus on more interesting tasks?

According to Shipler "soft skills" are traditionally learned at home. Or if they are not learned there, they are learned at school. And if not at school, they are learned at the work place. From the time they start going to kindergarten Japanese children are trained in punctuality, diligence, and a can－do attitude. They learn to do prescribed activities at prescribed times and ways. They learn that each person and each group has certain duties. They learn to discuss things in large and small groups.

But then in junior and senior high school they are introduced to and trained in a different system, one that resembles the military. And introducing recruits to that system traditionally means breaking them of their old sense of identity and creating a new one. They are trained to obey their teachers and club *sempai*. They are trained to conform to both their teachers and their peers. And they are punished when they do not.

In *The Japanese High School*： *Silence and Resistance*, Shoko Yoneyama discusses *ijime* in terms of this conformity： "by engaging in *ijime* students conform, consciously or not, to what teachers do to them and what teachers tell them to do." And that "*ijime* is far less mysterious if it is understood as 'copycat' behavior in which Japanese students model themselves on their teachers." And the basis for all classroom activity is a Hobbesian notion of power (to again quote Yoneyama)： "in a classroom power operates as the most fundamental ruling principle of human relations...The group becomes important, in this context, as the only certain source of quasi－absolute power." If one is skeptical about this statement, one should watch the movie "To Sir, With Love".

In the university classroom certainly something similar proved true： the students would not talk with each other until they had bonded, that is, had made friends with each other. And they would actively resist teacher directives. For example, when asked to prepare an English song for *karaoke* activities, they would practice and perform once. They would resist and not prepare a second song.

Randy Pausch, a computer science professor at Carnegie Mellon University, talks of the importance of having students introduce themselves to each other in order to facilitate communication when they do group work. He discusses this in *The Last Lecture* (2008). While the students in Pausch's classes would then do the assigned group work, the Japanese students would not. Or rather, they would speak in English when the teacher was part of the group, but would revert to Japanese when he left. In other words, group cohesion and cooperation had a greater priority than formal classroom objectives. A similar result was found in "Perspectives on an English Speaking Society" where membership in the group, the E.S.S., had a much higher priority than use of English. In fact, in the two and a half years of the current experiment, students have often commented that they wanted to change groups in mid－semester *in order to make more friends* (emphasis added).

Discussion

How does one explain this priority on the group and group cohesion to the exclusion of all else? Michael Zielenziger's study of *hikikomori*, *Shutting Out the Sun* (2006) is very helpful. He discusses the general importance in Japan of making friends and fitting into a group as well as the lack of social skills that are the result of an emphasis on academic achievement (especially on the all important university entrance examinations). This leads to codependence. In the words of psychiatrist Tsukasa Mizusawa： "unless you have a real sense of being enmeshed with others, dependent on others, then you cannot feel secure."

On the other hand, Zielenziger also mentions that those who treat *hikikomori* do so by emphasizing the importance of individual choice and responsibility in their rehabilitation. Since this paper's experimental focus on group work has also emphasized choice and responsibility, it seems those concepts only become fully operative when an individual is removed from a group. Thus it seems that *hikikomori* behavior is the complement of small group behavior. It also shows the enormous power of the group over the individual members.

In another attempt to understand small group behavior, linguist Deborah Tannen's *You Just Don't Understand* (1990) was consulted. One of Tannen's ideas is that gender differences are hardwired into communication patterns: that men basically tend to compete with each other when they talk and that women tend to do more sharing and encourage cooperation. She found these patterns occurring in children as young as three years old. In this paper's experiment these gender-related communication differences did not seem to be present. Regardless of whether a group was composed only of females, mixed in gender, or all males they seemed to follow female communication patterns. As the author's native language is not Japanese, perhaps this conclusion is incorrect, but the general trends of Japanese society would seem to suggest such female-oriented patterns with a hierarchy element. If this is indeed the case, the general social patterns will be reflected in small group behavior and priority will be placed on human interaction and creation of a support network of friends. As such, there really is no need to speak English in the group, except possibly when a teacher is present.

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