

Feature article: Allen Lindskoog & Robert Moreau

Standing in a New Place: Reflecting on Awareness and Development

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本稿でモローとリンズクーグは、Immediacy behaviour(教員の近接行動)すなわち言語・非言語行動によるインタラクションを試みることで、授業における教師の存在感とマインドフルネスを発展させる手法を提唱している。

Immediacy behaviourの例としてはアイコンタクト、ジェスチャー、生徒に対して名前でも呼んだり意見を求めるなどの行為が挙げられる。われわれ教師が生徒とのインタラクション、つまり交流に目を向け、教師が教室内で醸し出す雰囲気や習癖が影響を及ぼしていることに意識を向けるようになると、授業でのどのような行為が効果的か気づくことができる。

さらには、クラス内での様々な意思決定に関してより深く注意を向けることにつながる。教師が自己のImmediacy behaviourを内省するなど授業における意識を高める手法を採用することで活気あるスムーズな授業展開だけでなく、生徒の前向きな態度を引き出すことも期待できるだろう。

Krishnamurti (2000) states that the “teacher who is really teaching is one who is growing, awakening intelligence in himself and thus is awakening intelligence in the learner” (p 86). But how does a teacher grow when there is little time due to lesson and test preparation, teaching a class or because ingrained habits feel like the norm?

One answer could be by taking the time to step out of our daily routine and develop mindfulness and presence.

The impetus of this article came out of our experiences outside of the teaching context. Both of us have experience as meditation practitioners, and one of us has been a musician and the other an actor. We began to look at how these connected to our teaching. The common threads we found were concepts such as presence, being in the moment and mindfulness. One such connection was that fostering “mindfulness” could help build meaningful relationships with our students.

The concept of mindfulness, as it is used in this paper, follows the two-component model as defined by Bishop et al. (2004):

The first component involves the self-regulation of attention so that it is maintained on immediate experience, thereby allowing for increased recognition of mental events in the present moment. The second component involves adopting a particular orientation toward one’s experiences in the present moment, an orientation that is characterized by curiosity, openness, and acceptance. (p. 232)

For example, as the well-known Vietnamese Buddhist monk Thich Nat Hahn (2001) so eloquently states: “When you drink tea in mindfulness your mind and your body are perfectly united...When you sit in a café with music in the background and a lot of projects in your head, you are not really drinking your tea. You’re drinking your projects, you’re drinking your worries” (p 42). In the context of

teaching, we may be so focused on the fact that we don't have time to get through the allocated portion of the textbook or lesson plan that we don't really notice the fact that the students are smiling and enjoying the class. To be mindful is to deliberately notice our actions, reactions, and sensations, those of our students and the physical aspects of the classroom situation. If we are purposefully staying with the experience of teaching then we are actively engaged in every moment.

With this background in mind, we began our research journey looking for ways to explore interactions in our classroom environments in order to discover a means of fostering professional development. What we found were concepts such as reflection and behaviors that increase positive affect in the classroom, called 'immediacy behaviors', which we will discuss in greater detail in the next section of this paper.

Our next step was to take immediacy behaviors and marry them together with the concept of mindfulness and to try some classroom experiments. From there we introduced these experiments at various conferences around Tokyo. One very simple experiment, for example, was to ask participants to sit in silence for one minute focusing on their breath. This generated a wide variety of feedback, from those who felt completely comfortable, to those who felt sleepy and to those who felt quite uneasy with the experience. This has direct implications for how we behave in the classroom, in how we deal with silence and how we may sometimes be manipulated by students' silence.

Another experiment involved "repetition", a technique used by actors in training in which one of the partners makes a statement about the other person. The

respondent has to repeat their partner's statement, changing only the pronoun ("You look cheerful." "I look cheerful".) Intonation and timing can be used to question the meaning of the statement. This activity forces participants to focus on the feelings that exist between them in the present moment. The feedback we received varied from "I do not need to change a thing, everything is fine" to "the approach is fresh and new". The one surprise we found was that the concept of immediacy was virtually unknown to many language educators we spoke to during the various conferences and was one area we found that made the intangible concept of mindfulness tangible.

Immediacy behaviors and classroom interactions

In *Contrasting Conversations*, Fanselow (1992) states that there is no need to make drastic changes in the classroom in order to explore and develop our teaching practices. As an example he recommends asking a question with genuine interest as opposed to a neutral tone of voice (p. 52). This could be considered a verbal immediacy behavior. Verbal immediacy behaviors also include calling the students by name, finding out about their interests and opinions and incorporating the information into class activities, using self disclosure in the classroom, as well as using group reference, saying "we" as opposed to "I" (Bainbridge, Frymier & Houser, 2000; Witt & Wheelless, 2001; Kucuk, 2009). Additionally, non-verbal immediacy behaviors include, but are not limited to, eye contact, smiles, nods, gestures and body orientation (Andersen, 1979). As can be seen from these examples, immediacy behaviors are communication strategies that can help to bridge the teacher-student divide and may serve to create more

effective channels of communication. They are also, according to Gorham and Zakahi (1990), traits “which can be modified through training and practice” (as cited in Rocca & McCroskey, 1999, p. 315). We feel therefore that these micro-strategies of communication behavior can make a good starting point for teachers to reflect on their teaching practice, develop mindfulness, and initiate change into the classroom.

Andersen was the first to examine immediacy behaviors in the context of the classroom as a way of providing empirical evidence on what constitutes an effective teacher with regards to teacher-student interactions (Andersen, 1979). In the 30 years since then, research on immediacy has been published dealing with such varied contexts as students in cross-cultural situations (Park et al, 2009), the effects of immediacy on student compliance-resistance in learning, (Burroughs, 2007) and teacher immediacy in computer mediated education (Kucuk, 2009). Research on immediacy has shown that the non-verbal behaviors, which signal the teacher’s attentiveness to the students produce consistently positive results with regard to students’ affect towards the teacher and subject (Andersen, 1979; Frymier & Houser, 2000; Witt & Wheelless, 2001).

Verbal and non-verbal immediacy behaviors could both be significant for the EFL classroom where the teacher’s manner of interaction plays an important role in creating a classroom environment where learners feel safe to develop communicative skills, as well as providing a language model that students will take with them outside of the classroom. Students are likely to be more motivated if their teacher is a good role model as a communicator and seeks to develop good relationships with them (Dornyei & Csizer, 1998). A further advantage

of reflecting on immediacy behaviors is that it can allow us a means to become more aware of the environment in which we teach. Being mindful of how we communicate both verbally and non-verbally may also lead to an understanding of other people’s needs, and consequently to a better working relationship with our students.

Teaching is both relational and content driven. We know what we have to teach given the curriculum, but how effective is the channel of communication within the student-teacher relationship? Studies on immediacy behaviors, as previously mentioned, provide a well-researched pool of information that teachers can draw on in order to look at their own classroom interactions with a fresh perspective or to perhaps discover some alternatives to introduce into their practice. Experimentation in the classroom can provide the opportunities we need to explore and develop.

The classroom as an experimental space

We suggest treating the classroom like an experiment, looking at the reactions of the students to our actions and movement and noticing what works. Which of our behaviors are mere habits and which are done with meaningful intent? Teachers can take note of these results themselves or, if possible, have a colleague observe their behavior in order to offer an alternative opinion or different perspective. This can help raise awareness of communication behaviors in a way that is impossible for a teacher to do on their own (Croker, 2007).

By knowing our habits we can begin to reshape our presence in the classroom, which will contribute to our growth as a teacher. For example, in one of Robert’s classes, with eight adult students, he found himself falling into the habit of starting the class with the same

activity, mainly because it was easy and popular with the students. Time was given for students to catch up with the people next to them about their weekly activities. He felt, upon reflection, that it was producing similar statements from the students from week to week and his role and interaction with the students felt stagnant. As an experiment, Robert asked the students to stand and mingle with different partners away from their chairs. Timing the students also allowed them to speak to more people. He joined various pairs for a short time each, becoming more of a conversation partner rather than a “traditional” teacher, thus somewhat changing his role and relationship in the classroom. This was a small change but Robert believed that it helped to foster a stronger bond between him and the students. In trying variations on this activity and taking note of the results Robert felt that he had developed a sense of mindfulness about an aspect of the classroom that had, in the past, gone largely unnoticed thus opening the door for future developments in the classroom.

Experimentation with an activity such as this doesn't have to stop at the first iteration. For example, instead of only catching up on weekly activities, Robert might want to ask about the students' opinions of class activities, or ask for suggestions in order to make the class more effective. Through small modifications an activity that was at one time merely a classroom habit can be transformed into a more dynamic learning experience for both the teacher and the students.

Allen conducted a simple experiment by standing in a new place when teaching. He noticed that more often than not he stood in one particular area, at the front of the room behind the lectern. He tried moving out from behind the lectern to different areas of the of the classroom noticing how the changes

affected the students. He taught from the back of the room, sitting down in a chair, from the opposite side of the room from the podium location and circulating amongst the students. What was evident right away was that teaching from the back of the room grabbed the students' attention in a very different way. Rather than focusing on Allen's physical presence, there was a feeling that they were paying attention to his voice. Sitting down brought a sense of equality with regards to power, which was evident in the students' laughter, playfulness, lighthearted feeling and Allen's sense of a closer connection to the students. Teaching from the opposite side of the room from the podium actually raised the level of attention and a feeling of inclusion of students who had been originally the furthest away from Allen. When circulating around the classroom, there was less connection and more of a sense of monitoring students.

The main objectives are to approach the class in a spirit of experimentation, not knowing quite what to expect but being open to what occurs and fostering a sense of awareness and presence. Additionally, it may not be sufficient to try this just once. Trying a new behaviour a number of times may be necessary to really feel the different changes. In many cases classroom dynamics may change right away.

Good intentions alone could become counter-productive if teachers are not aware of what students will be comfortable with. If the teacher suddenly introduces too high a degree of immediacy into the classroom, an uncomfortable classroom atmosphere may result. In a class of adult learners, Robert changed the position of the students' chairs into a tight circle and he joined the group as an equal participant. Students in that class found this new configuration strange - the teacher was just too close for comfort. This was evident in the body language of the students as well as their uncomfortable silence. Later in the class

Robert resumed his place at the front of the room with the students in a semi-circle in front of him, and the class interactions felt different and went smoothly.

Knowledge of the students' needs as well as their classroom expectations can be useful information that can guide our own development as teachers. Sharing journals with students, employing immediacy behaviors, asking about past learning experiences, as well as discovering what students' expectations are for the class can all add to creating a base of knowledge from which a teacher can be more mindful of the interactions in the classroom. It is experimentation in the classroom which brings this background knowledge to the forefront. Above all, the goal is to effect meaningful change for development, not change for change's sake.

Conclusion

Everyone's teaching journey is different and requires a unique set of solutions for relevant change. This paper recommends increasing attention to immediacy behaviours as a means of raising our awareness of our interactions with students and of the impact our behaviors, moods and habits have on these interactions. It is not intended as a prescriptive set of techniques for creating the ideal student-teacher relationship; instead it is a particular perspective from which teachers can experiment in order to gather information about what works and what doesn't work in the classroom so we can be more mindful of the choices we make as educators. Engaging in practices that increase awareness of our classroom situations, such as self-reflection on immediacy behaviors, can help us develop a

fresh, flowing teaching style, and in the process, encourage a positive attitude in our students toward their learning journey.

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