

## Learning to Teach, Teaching to Learn: Pragmatics Instruction by Students

教えることを学ぶ、学ぶために教える - 学生による語用論教育 -

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ALT's current slogan is "Learning to teach, teaching to learn." From a teacher's perspective, these words remind us that we can keep learning and developing, and that part of our job is the promotion of learner development. My poster for JALT 2017's Learner Development Forum used the same slogan, but with primary reference to the learner rather than the teacher: language learners learning to teach and, through teaching and reflecting on their teaching, learning about the subject matter they are teaching, the importance of their chosen topic, and the challenge of teaching itself. Although this project was conceived only as a vehicle for learning and learner development, it has given me as a teacher much more than I expected. Over the past 18 months of reflection, starting with preparation for an in-house Active Learning poster session at my university, followed by the JALT 2017 Learner Development SIG Forum, and now this report, I have had a real opportunity to experience afresh both halves of this slogan.

In this short reflective article, I will begin by describing the project, with the help of the poster shown at the LD Forum. I will also address these questions: *How, one year later, did a further class of learners perceive the value of the project?* and *What may be the value of learner and teacher reflections on a project such as this?*

The participants in this project, 3<sup>rd</sup> year English Department students at a provincial Japanese university, were in the second semester of a two-year seminar course, or *zemi*. In terms of English proficiency, these students would probably be in the top third of the year's 120+ English Department students, with TOEIC scores at the time between 500 and 800. They had chosen one of the two "English-medium" *zemi* classes, and were relatively confident English users, but only one or two planned to become teachers, and all were understandably nervous about this teaching project.

In the first semester, these 3<sup>rd</sup> year students had studied some aspects of sociolinguistics, focusing mainly on language varieties and choices. In their fourth year they would be choosing a topic on which to focus, conduct research, and write a graduation thesis. In this in-between semester, there were two main objectives:

1. For students to gain a general understanding of the focus, scope, and importance of pragmatics, both with respect to their native language and culture and to English-speaking cultures;
2. For students to gain experience and ability in writing a fairly long, structured academic paper in English.

From 2011, working as co-editor of the Pragmatics SIG publication, *Pragmatics: Bringing pragmatics to the second language classroom* (Ronald, Rinnert, Fordyce, & Knight, 2012), I received a real flood of pragmatics-focused teaching activities that needed looking at, editing, and maybe trying out. Many of these were tested with this class as a way of introducing various aspects of pragmatics to the class and of demonstrating the relevance of pragmatics to the students' lives as language learners and as language users. Three years later, with the book published and well used, much of this teaching had moved from me

to them, becoming a peer-teaching project. In pairs, students bought the book and selected a chapter from this book of 64 pragmatics-teaching activities. They studied the aspect of pragmatics treated in their chapter, and then prepared to teach the activity: first to their classmates, then to a class of 2<sup>nd</sup> year students, typically one year younger than they were.

As the peer teaching project developed, so too did the report writing side of the project. As part of the two-year *zemi* class, each student spends much of the final year working on an original language-focused research project, which is then written up as the student's graduation thesis. Prior to that, by writing a similarly structured, but more scaffolded, report of their teaching project, the students gain useful practice in preparation for writing their graduation theses.

**Figure 1. Learner Development SIG Forum Poster, JALT2016**

**Learning to Teach, Teaching to Learn:  
Pragmatics Instruction by Students**

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**September - November**  
**Introductory study of pragmatics:**  
materials based on Yule (1996),  
and PowerPoint presentation on  
pragmatics and language teaching

**Teaching pragmatics**  
**October - December**

**In pairs, choose topic to teach :**  
How to apologize, refuse an invitation, response tokens, repetition, tell not ask, euphemisms, how to use *sumimasen*...

**With partner, plan, prepare to teach**  
Topic, plan, handouts

**Practice teaching with seminar classmates**  
First teaching experience: 12-15 students, friends

**Collect feedback, revise teaching plan:**  
Comprehension, interest

**Teach 2<sup>nd</sup> year class:**  
**Speaking, PIE III**  
15-20 students, mostly unknown

**Collect feedback, Teaching reflection**  
Mostly positive, some (self) criticism

**PRAGMATIC RESOURCES**

**Pragmatics: Bringing Pragmatics to Second Language Classrooms**  
A Publication of the JALT Pragmatics SIG  
Edited by Jim Ronald, Carol Rinnert, Kenneth Fordyce, & Tim Knight

**Report of teaching**  
**November - January**

**Introduction, Outline**  
Greeting, guiding reader

**Literature Review**  
Teaching pragmatics, student's own topic

**Teaching description**  
Class, lesson plan

**Discussion / Reflection**  
Own reflection, student feedback

**Conclusion**  
What was done, What was learned

**References**

**Appendix**  
Handouts, feedback slips

**Report process:** submitted → returned with feedback → revised → resubmitted

- Not all activities may be suitable for novice teachers: more guidance may be needed.
- Students typically needed more time and guidance for reflecting on their teaching.
- Students needed differing amounts and types of support: for teaching, finding references, writing their reports.

## Student Reflection

Student reflection has been an important part of this project. Working in pairs with a classmate, typically a friend, gave opportunities for supportive discussion and reflection throughout the project. Three times during the students' preparation and teaching, each pair receives feedback: first, from *zemi* classmates following their teaching; next, from their teacher on their teaching plan and materials as part of the preparation to teach; and finally from the 2<sup>nd</sup> year students straight after teaching them. This teaching-related feedback was among the many opportunities for participant reflection through the project. Their reflections on the teaching project as a whole were recorded in the conclusions of their reports.

### Reflecting on teaching.

Many of the students' comments focused on what they learned about teaching. Here are three:

*First, I thought this pragmatics teaching would be easy because I just have to speak and make the students understand, but this was really difficult. (Makoto)*

*I could learn how to make which the classmate can understand easily and teaching is interesting because I could share my opinion with others. (Moe)*

*After this class, I can get confidence to explain pragmatics, especially how to apologize in English. (Chinatsu)*

These three comments are of particular interest for the way the reflections, in different ways, went beyond reports of the activities. In Makoto's case, he reflects on the unexpected challenge of "teaching to do": finding a way for students to understand, and to be sure enough of understanding to respond. For Moe, learning to teach was equated with a skill beyond teaching: learning to express her thoughts in English. Chinatsu, too, reports how doing this teaching activity gave her the ability to explain and illustrate the topic of her *zemi*, something that students may well be required to do when job hunting.

### Reflection on pragmatics.

Other comments focused on what the students learned about pragmatics through the project:

*Through our teaching activity, I felt our utterances support our friendship... (Aika)*

*For example, most students also had trouble refusing in English. I knew that and I think that this topic is an important field to learn for students who are studying English like us. (Ruka)*

Here, too, the responses reflect an increased awareness, and appreciation, of the practical value of studying pragmatics not simply as an academic subject but as a guide to the maintenance of good relationships.

### Preparing the poster with a class of students going through each stage of the project.

Finally, there were also comments from students on the value of teaching as a way for them to learn what they were teaching:

*I learned the important things from this teaching class. At first one is the ability of understanding. If I don't really understand pragmatics, I can't teach it to the students. And*

*if the students ask me about pragmatics or contents of teaching, I need to answer which is easy to understand. (Chinatsu)*

*In addition, through this activity, I thought when we had what we wanted to learn or understand, it was a good way to teach them to someone. To teach someone, first we have to research and understand it. Next we consider how we should teach so that they can understand it. Then, we actually teach and get the feedback. (Ruka)*

Both these students realized the value of teaching as a means of learning and synthesizing what was taught, and of the motivating imperative to understand the topic well that is contained within this activity.

### **Teacher Reflection**

As a language teacher, specifically one concerned both with learner development and with the teaching of aspects of pragmatics as foreign language education, the whole project has continued to be a worthwhile venture for me. I will conclude by considering what I have learned from the whole process, stage by stage:

- (a) preparing the poster over the months as a class of students went through each stage of the project;
- (b) one year later, using the poster as a resource to introduce the project to a new class of students, and to serve as a guide for me as we proceeded with the project;
- (c) bringing the poster to the Learner Development SIG Forum, and writing up this report, pushed and prodded by readers' comments as the report was expanded and revised.

#### **Preparing the poster as students go through each stage of the project.**

Putting together the poster as a class of students and I went through each stage of it 18 months ago rendered it a much more reflective and memorable experience than the project had been the previous year: It required more verbalized reflection on the part of the students, it had to tell a story beyond describing the project, and, to be worth doing, it had to inform the future conducting of this project. For this reason, not only were the stages of the parallel tracks of teaching and writing up recorded as part of the project description, but so too were the students' reflections on these, and my own practical recommendations for future conducting of the project.

#### **Using the poster as a learning resource and teaching guide.**

One year later, the poster served as a very useful aid for introducing the project to the following year's class: demonstrating the steps and the flow of the two sides of the students' project—the teaching of pragmatics, and the writing up of the report. It also helped from the perspective of face validity: Although most students were nervous about teaching, the poster gave them confidence, to see that the project was well prepared, that they themselves would be well prepared before their experience of teaching, and that a previous class of students had experienced, survived, and valued the experience.

#### **Presenting, writing, responding about the project.**

With the project having been already conducted and reflected on, and a poster produced, the recommendations at the foot of the poster were now “*advice to self*” that could be taken for this year's project. The advice was taken in most cases: More guidance was given to help students choose activities that were not too difficult; and there was more

support for writing the literature review. The suggestion, recorded on the poster, that more time and guidance should be provided for reflection was overlooked, although this could easily have been addressed, and will be the next time.

The distance served another important role in my own education as a teacher of pragmatics. It gave me the opportunity to realize that, however good the teaching may have been, a single teaching session encounter with the target pragmatics topic would not be sufficient for the students to learn it adequately. To give an example, learning how to apologize in a foreign language involves various types of knowledge: realization that “*sorry*” alone is no more adequate as an apology than its equivalent in the students’ first language; realization that the “*contents*” of an apology can be identified and listed (admission of fact, concern for the “*victim*,” offer of compensation, and expression of intention to not repeat the accident); learning that—in this case—the contents in their first language and English are broadly the same; and learning the language to express these contents appropriately in English. This realization resulted in my continuing the students’ topics in subsequent classes, and even—at the students’ request—including three of the topics in the final exam for the course.

To bring the poster to the LD Forum, and then to write this report, has provoked further reflection on this project, and on the poster as a product of, and instrument for, reconsidering the project. There was, unfortunately, not as much discussion at the Forum as I might have hoped, in part because I had another presentation that coincided with the second half of the Forum and I was not able to be present for this. I did, however, receive two comments that have had a significant impact on this report.

The first was a suggestion to compare the two years of the project, and this has been done above. In fact, as stated earlier, these two years do not report the birth of this project; there was at least one complete cycle of the project prior to these. However, the first time the project was just done, with no written reflection, and only a handout outlining the stages of the project for the students’ benefit.

The second comment received at the Forum is worth reproducing in full, because this whole reflective report is a response to that comment:

*An extremely interesting project involving students in major extended activities with their peers and juniors. It would be interesting to see a meta-reflection by Jim on the first two groups to undertake, reflect upon, and report on these activities.*

Finally, the preparation of the poster and the writing of this report have both been “*pushed reflection*,” with extra prods for further reflection from the two readers of this report. This pushed reflection was also a part of the students’ teaching reports, and were all the better for it. Such reflection on practice may seem to be a luxury—there’s often hardly time to prepare for class, to do the homework, or whatever—but this experience has been a valuable reminder of the importance for both teachers and learners to not simply teach and study, but for both to be reflective practitioners.

Reading through this report and looking forward to conducting this project with this coming year’s class, I’ve come to realize that while some students do share valuable reflections on the project (which are included in this report), others do this very little. In order to help those who are slower in verbalizing their reflections, it may be worth preparing questions for consideration before the project, to help the learners give focused consideration of the value of what they are doing. This might reduce the impact of discovery, realizing through experience and reflection the value of what was done, but, for many of the learners, it may provide a useful framework for reflection. Questions such as the following may be useful:

- In what ways have you been a teacher so far in your life?
- In what various ways can you imagine that you may be a teacher in the future?
- Do teachers learn through teaching?
- How could the amount learning gained through teaching be increased?
- What do you imagine is easy about teaching pragmatics? What is difficult?

If these questions are printed out, the students could answer these questions at the beginning of the project, then return to these at the end, as they reflect on the value of what they have done.

Finishing this report with a list of questions may give an impression of unfinished work, yet it is appropriate that it does give this impression: *The report is finished, but the project is still work in progress. We are still learning to teach, teaching to learn.*

## Reference

Ronald, J., Rinnert, C., Fordyce, K., & Knight, T. (2012). *Pragtivities: Bringing pragmatics to second language classrooms*. Tokyo: JALT Pragmatics SIG.

## Reader Response to “Learning to Teach, Teaching to Learn: Pragmatics Instruction by Students”

Elisa Acosta, Asia University

The project as a whole is a great idea especially for students who want to become teachers. It lets them notice how much preparation it takes to be able to explain topics to another person. It also enhances students' awareness of the topics they have chosen, as well as providing chances for students to practice giving feedback to each other and work together as a group. The project is multi-dimensional and serves as a way for students to learn as they teach.

One particularly positive feature of the project is that it makes students aware of what goes behind a pragmatics topic or event. Jim gives the example of apologizing and how it involves more than merely just saying "I am sorry." These events are not easy to explain. In some cases, students as teachers might have to provide extra examples to be able to make other students understand their topic. Students also need to make connections between the sociolinguistic norms of their culture and those of Anglophone cultures for apologizing. They need to understand the content very well to be able to present it successfully to their classmates. I also like the idea that the students present twice as this gives them opportunities to develop their ideas and/or add extra examples. Students give each other feedback and can make changes to the project without it affecting their final grades.

Jim, you mentioned students having problems coming up with their own reflections, especially with verbalizing their opinions. You suggested using questions. I thought it might also be helpful to have students keep a journal to collect their ideas, emotions, sources, and opinions all in one place. Anytime they work on the project students could be encouraged to take five minutes to reflect on what they did, did not do, and/or what they want to accomplish during the project. By keeping a journal students can document and visualize more easily the progress of their project. They could keep all their ideas in one place and keep track of things that worked or did not work. If the students ever felt they were stuck and needed some form of help, they could write their thoughts down and look at them later. They could also share the ideas with a classmate and get other opinions than the teacher's. The journal might even help students in the future when writing their graduation theses after they finish the pragmatics project. This could benefit both you and the students. As a teacher, you can keep track of their progress and the students can keep track on the development of their ideas. It may not be easy to implement, but if it's done with third and fourth year students it might work. I would like to hear how you and the students feel before and after the project is completed. It would also be good to know about what changes you will implement for future projects. Thank you for sharing this project with us, Jim.

## Reader Response to “Learning to Teach, Teaching to Learn: Pragmatics Instruction by Students”

Sarah Morikawa, Chiba University

In his short reflective article, Jim Ronald describes a project in which students need to research one aspect of pragmatics, and teach other students about that aspect. During the process, the students receive feedback from both students and teacher, then write a paper on their experiences of learning and teaching. In this cycle of preparation, action, and modification, reflection is an essential ingredient at each— stage both for the teacher and the students. Through reflection, teachers can revise goals and improve their input, while students can review their performance, identify paths towards improvement, and increase their motivation.

As a teacher, I would like to reproduce this type of “*zemi*,” particularly in our English Support Centre (ESC) where workshops and classes are elective and uncredited. For this reason, two points in the article were of special interest to me. Firstly, practical information and ideas, such as using a poster as a tool for explanation of the course, are very helpful. I have developed courses and workshops over a number of cycles, modifying the contents and aims at the end of each semester, but have not used an introductory poster before. As Jim says, it would be very effective to show the students, in visual form, how the course or project will proceed. I was also interested in details about the students that were not mentioned in the article, such as the number of students in the class; the aspects of pragmatics students chose; and types of input and feedback. It would be interesting to find out whether/how the project could be developed in different situations, for example, in cases in which participation is entirely voluntary.

Related to this is the issue of motivation. When students use teaching as a means of learning in a university context, what motivates them? For some, it may be that they have to do the task in order to earn credits, while, for others, this may involve a sense of responsibility or the anticipated feeling of satisfaction when they have communicated successfully. Some of Jim’s students appeared to be motivated to learn about their aspect of pragmatics in order to teach it to others effectively. It would be interesting to investigate the combinations of different influences on motivation, as this would be an important factor if students were not on a credited course. When it comes to reflection, Jim mentions that some students were more motivated to reflect, whereas others were less so. Jim’s idea of providing a framework with questions relating to teaching in other areas of life is useful, as this would bridge the gap between class and “real life.” I would tentatively suggest some more specific questions or prompts to elicit more specific information e.g., “What did you learn by teaching pragmatics that you might not have learned if you had only studied by using the textbook?” and “Why do you think so?”

In the ESC at our university, students form groups, in order to study for exams such as IELTS or TOEFL iBT. Usually these study groups decide on a group aim for the week such as improving their reading speed or increasing their spoken accuracy, work individually toward that aim during the week, then reflect on their study methods and results, before reporting back to the group. One finding from a study that I did of questionnaires completed by students is that

students in study groups do not like to spend much time on reflection about their own study methods or strategies even if they find their group members' reflections helpful. Many comments on reflection feedback sheets from our students are practical and basic, e.g., "*I could improve my speaking using these materials.*" Further comments on how or why s/he improved were not included. Students may have kept reflection basic because they lacked the English to write specifically, or did not want to spend the time needed to do so. For this reason, bilingual feedback may be more productive, and clear guidelines or prompts should help students to add depth to their reflections.

All in all, responding to Jim's project has led me to consider trying out a more systematic way of encouraging students to learn by teaching on a wider scale in our centre and to investigate to what extent teaching activities impact on the students' motivation.