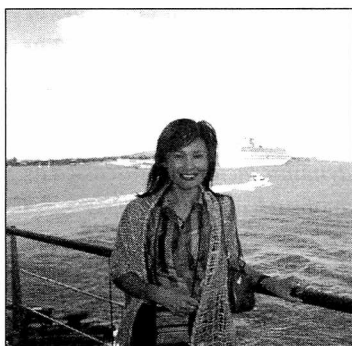


Part 3: Inquiry into instructional practices

“How we got hooked” What motivated students to commit themselves so fervently into autonomous and collaborative English learning projects?



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ABOUT YOKO

I live in the Yatsugatake Mountains, two hours west of Tokyo, and I also have lived in Auckland, New Zealand, and New York City. My interests are in group dynamics, autonomy, affect, and extensive reading and listening. I am also interested in facilitating language learning in the context of spiritual development. I like traveling, photography, and being in the nature.

私は東京から二時間ほど西にあたる、八ヶ岳に住んでいます。またニュージーランドのオークランドとニューヨークに住んだこともあります。私に関心を持

っているのは、グループ・ダイナミックス、自律学習、情動、エクステンシヴ・リーディングとリスニングです。また精神修養の場においての語学学習支援にも、興味があります。旅行と写真、そして自然の中にいることが好きです。

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ABSTRACT

A group of 14 non-English major students in a four-year-long semi-intensive English program at Meiji University went thorough a major slump in terms of their motivation level in their first year. However, from the beginning of their second year, the group miraculously transformed itself into an autonomous and collaborative group, carrying out time-consuming and often student-directed collaborative English projects, such as writing and producing digital films, plays, musicals, organizing English camps, and teaching themselves to conduct debate tournaments. They also started to work efficiently with each other and bond strongly within the group. This paper is the first of a series of work that the author conducted based on taped student discussions and interviews, attempting to analyze the reasons why this group of students followed such a course of a major slump followed by a seemingly sudden upheaval in their motivational levels. Based on the students' feedback, some suggestions for encouraging autonomy and collaboration in language classrooms in general are summarized, and the importance of human relationships and group dynamic factors are discussed as an essential foundation for autonomous collaboration to take place among a learning group.

明治大学の4年間のセミ・インテンシヴ英語プログラムに所属する、英語を専攻としない学生14名のクラスの動機レベルは、1年目に深刻な状態に陥った。ところが、このグループは、2年目の始めから、奇跡的に自律的かつ協力的なグループへと変容し、例えばデジタル映画、模擬裁判、ミュージカルを執筆、演出、上演したり、英語による合宿を計画し運営したり、ディベート・トーナメントの方法を教えあうなど、時間を要する、主に学生主導の共同英語プロジェクトを行なうようになった。彼らはまた効率よく活動するようになり、グループとしても強く結束した。この論文は、筆者がこれらの学生のディスカッションとインタビューのテープをもとに行なった一連の研究の、第一弾である。深刻なスランプの後、この学生グループの動機レベルが急に激変した理由について分析を試みる。また、学生の感想や意見に基づき、自律学習とグループ・ワークを語学クラスで奨励するための提案についても、手短かに述べる。学習グループ内で自律的共同作業が円滑に行なわれるためには、人間関係とグループ・ダイナミックスの要素が重要であり、欠くことのできない土台であると論じられる。

I. HOW I GOT MOTIVATED TO START THIS RESEARCH

A MAJOR SLUMP

“Would this group actually be able to even hold together next year?” This was a genuine question I had toward the end of the first year with this group of students, which started with 24 and rapidly diminished into 14 in less than eight months. The attendance rate was getting worse and worse, and even our strict attendance rules (basically, three absences per class per

semester and you were out) could not make them come to class anymore. Nobody seemed to be able to stop people from quitting, and we, the teachers started, to wonder if there would be anybody left when the second year began...

A SUDDEN MIRACULOUS “RESURRECTION” AND THEN AN “EXPLOSION”!!!

Then, all of a sudden, in April the following year, the group seemed not only “resurrected,” but totally recharged, and students started to look happier, more serious, and enthusiastic about their projects, either teacher-directed or student-initiated. People showed up with an enthusiasm of, say, attending a party. It seemed like they no longer needed strict attendance rules or perhaps even grades. They looked as if they just wanted to be there.

By the end of their second year, they had conducted two English camps which were packed with English presentations and activities, taught themselves debate procedures and conducted debate matches in my classes, upgraded and added huge bilingual contents to our program’s website (EPC Group 2001, 2002). During the summer break, they then wrote, produced, and performed a court case play in English (See Figure 1) with an extremely sophisticated digital film of situations surrounding a murder inserted into this play filled with legal terminology. They also produced and performed a musical, *The Lion King*, and produced a graduation and homecoming party for 90 people or so, filled again with English presentations, and made full use of their computer skills. And this is just naming a few of their accomplishments in a period of nine short months!

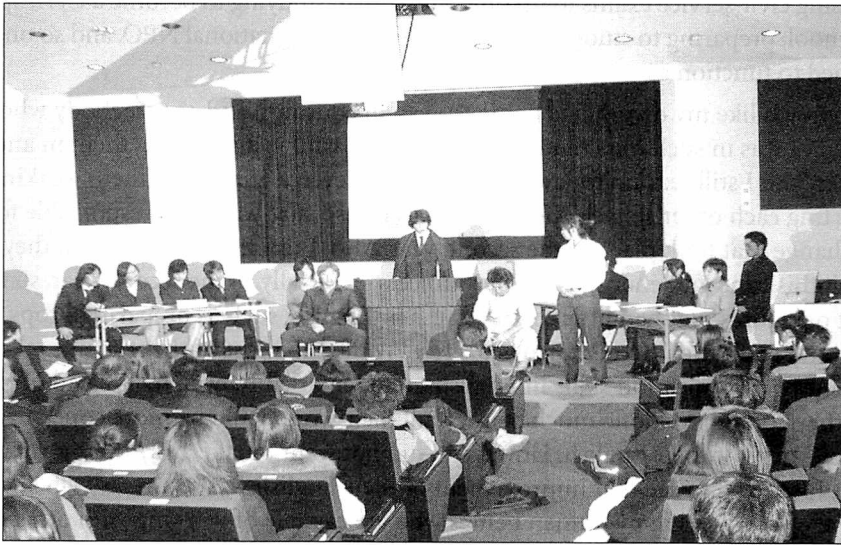


Figure 1. Mock court case performed on campus (December 2002)

We saw many of them work days and nights into projects none of us teachers had told them to do. I remember having to ask them not to work so hard and please get more sleep almost every time I saw them. We also noticed they were getting to know each other very well. They seemed to be so good at allocating different jobs to the most appropriate person and everything seemed to get done immediately and efficiently. They studied and socialized together. They spent many nights working together at each other’s dwellings. They celebrated each other’s birthdays with home-baked cakes. They had arguments from time to time, but it never seemed to break the bonds they had created with each other. The class had turned into a family. They seemed to work much more efficiently together and with more loving dedication than most professionals I had

ever seen in my life! Everything looked so beautiful, almost too good to believe. I was touched deeply, and so seemed many others including their other teachers, administrators, and peers who happened to observe how hard and happily they worked together.

BONDING STRENGTHENS AND AUTONOMY BLOSSOMS AS THE YEAR GOES BY

I went on a sabbatical for two years in New Zealand in this group's junior and senior years. Usually, as the number of classes decreases into only one (and non-credited) from three a week in the first two years, the bonding weakens, and the group diminishes to just a few people, who are extremely enthusiastic about studying English much on their own. However, this group was different. They stuck together even though many of them chose to belong to the most demanding seminars in their specializations, and NOBODY DROPPED OUT in the meantime. Moreover, when I requested for a few people's possible participation in my presentation at JALT2004, 11 out of 14 paid their own expenses to go from Tokyo to Nara, which was more than a whole night's drive, and they created a special video for the presentation outside their class requirements. Again, they seemed to be so happy together again, and worked incredibly well and efficiently together preparing for this. They seemed to take much pride in being given the opportunity to present before language teachers. When I came back from New Zealand in April 2005, right after their graduation, they also showed me another original digital film that they created, which became their graduation project (outside their requirements for graduation). I also learned that many people were putting a lot of individual effort into improving their English for their own purposes, such as passing civil-service exams to become a diplomat, studying to become a CPA, applying to graduate school, preparing to study abroad, launching an international NPO, and so on, and the group seemed to function as a supportive cocoon.

Actually, it was like my dream had come true as an educator, and as somebody who was close to them, I was in such bliss that I often became tearful just watching them in and outside of my classes, and I still tear up today whenever I have even a glimpse of them working with and supporting each other so well. However, I was not so sure what was responsible for the dramatic change that took place in the second year. Also, I realized that although they were spending all this time and energy into their projects, especially in the second year, so much had to be spent on chores that had little to do with their English, such as preparing props, booking classrooms and equipment to be borrowed, etc.... Although most of the students seemed to improve their communication skills in English quite remarkably, even by the end of the second year, I felt they could have done much better if all their work could be more concentrated into their improvement of their English. However, I did not want to take away their joy in working as they did. It seemed to me that improvement of their English was secondary when compared to their development as happy human beings who are capable of working with others so well.

As I kept witnessing the increasing bonding and autonomy taking place in this group, I was convinced that it was my job to find out what had gone wrong especially in the previous year(s), and also learn what was behind the dramatic changes I was observing. I consulted my former colleague, Dr. Junko Kurahachi, an educational psychologist who has been interested in our program for some time and has conducted some research on EPC Group2000 previously (Kurahachi & Morimoto, 2001). She introduced me to a useful tool to analyze students' motivation, called WTC, a "Willingness to Communicate" model developed by McIntyre et al. (1998). In 2003, I started analyzing the students' feedback, which is the major component of this paper, and Dr. Kurahachi and I co-presented our analysis using WTC at the Learner Development Forum at JALT2003. The current paper is a more detailed description and analysis of the students' feedback on what triggered the dramatic changes of their motivational levels, without employing WTC.

Then, based on the conclusions I have made in this paper, I went on to write another paper, in which I attempted to use the principals of “group dynamics” to analyze mainly the group formation process looking again at the same data (Morimoto 2005). The work was much inspired by Dörnyei and Murphey’s book on group dynamics in language learning (Dörnyei & Murphey 2003). I feel the current paper and the subsequent, but already published one, form a pair supplementing each, this paper being more detailed on the actual data collected from students, and the latter, being more focused on analysis based on group-forming theories of group dynamics. I would be happy to send readers an electronic copy of the other paper upon request.

Also, in the past four years since I started this research, as I mentioned above, the students themselves in this group started to collaborate with me. Since then, I have presented at JALT with my students twice, first in the Learner Development Forum with 11 students when they were seniors (Morimoto, 2004), and then with Takeshi Komoto, who is also mentioned later as one of the three individual interviewees, and who acted as a representative for the already graduated members in the following year (Morimoto, 2005b). It seems that these presentation projects further boosted their motivation and strengthened their bonds.

WHAT’S EPC?

EPC (1991-2006), the English Proficiency Course in the School of Political Science and Economics, Meiji University, was an elective semi-intensive course for those who would like to take more English classes to improve their communicative skills. There was a selection process in the beginning of the first year, and once they entered the course, they were expected to take three 90-minute classes a week in the first and second years, and one class a week in the third and fourth years on another campus. At the beginning of the second year, a few students were allowed, via a selection process, to join in the program to make up for the students who had dropped out in the previous year. Courses in the program were taught mostly by native speakers using English as the teaching medium, except for me in recent years, and each of the teachers were quite independent in what they taught. Each class had a maximum of 24 students in the beginning, and it had a tendency to get smaller as it progressed over the four years.

The characteristics of the program may be summarized as follows:

1. Teacher-directed and student-directed collaborative projects
2. Use of multi-media
3. Drama and presentation skills
4. Extensive pleasure reading and video watching
5. Intensive and extensive listening
6. Two English camps every year in spring and autumn
7. Encouraging peer learning and influences across different groups
8. Emphasis on human development as well as on improvement in English language skills
9. Incorporation of student opinions and writings into curriculum, materials development, and the student selection process of the EPC program.

HIGH DROPOUT RATES>>REFORM>>ACE PROGRAM

Due to the demanding amounts of group and individual assignments and projects, and lack of credits given to about half of their classes and some other factors which are going to be discussed in this article, there were quite high dropout rates (Morimoto, 2001). After many

discussions and bureaucratic procedures over the years leading up this study, in April 2003, 12 years since the inauguration of this rather experimental (in its status also!) program, EPC was reformed into a new and more formal program with a new name, called ACE, or Advanced Communicative English. The university now allows twice as many students to be enrolled in the program, and offers credits for all the work they do in the program. ACE students are also exempt from having to take additional regular required English classes, which EPC students had been required to take in the past.

EPC GROUP 2001

The EPC group who entered in April 2001, about whom I am writing about, turned out to be one of the last groups of students in this program.

In the first two years, Phillip Zitowitz, Kevin Mark, Kate Elwood, and I taught them. Phillip Zitowitz, who has a strong background in professional drama and musical productions as well as photography, had spent much of his class time for those activities. Kate Elwood, who taught them in the first year only, focused on speech acts and intercultural awareness. Kevin Mark, whose expertise is in development of learner-corpus-based CALL software, employed it when he taught this group in its second year. In the two years I had this group, I had them read, write, listen, and discuss a lot in small groups based on pleasure reading and video viewing assignments, requiring them to read many books, newspaper and magazine articles in paper and electronic media, as well as watch videos and DVDs. I also introduced them to peer-teaching and peer-evaluation through TALK Learning System (Junge, 1998-2002) and taught them basic presentation skills. Kermit Carvel who taught them in their third and fourth years utilized his specializations in journalism and film production to help the students write and produce a few digital films. In general, all the EPC teachers this group had encouraged small group learning.

SELECTION PROCESS

In April 2001, 24 students were selected for the program. First, there had been an orientation to the EPC program, for which about 200 or more freshmen turned up, where most of the teachers of the program and a few second-year students explained what the program was about. A few days later, those who wanted to enroll in the program submitted an application form in which they stated, in Japanese or English, the reasons why they wanted to apply. Then, there was an English test, interviews in English by the teachers, and in Japanese by second- and third-year students. The interviews were conducted in small groups mainly to see their motivation levels and their willingness to communicate in English, and cooperate with others in group-learning situations.

GROUP 2000 AS THEIR “SENPAI” (SENIOR MEMBERS)

Group 2001 was welcomed by the then second-year students (Group 2000), who had demanded us, especially me, earlier in 2002 that they wanted to be a lot more autonomous in their classes and camps and they wanted to actually plan and run some of my classes and the camps on their own under my supervision (Morimoto, 2002). After some consideration and consultation with my peers, I decided to let them do as they requested because I was quite impressed by the enthusiasm I felt from them toward improving EPC, and I thought it might be a good chance for them to take more charge of their own learning. I also genuinely felt that I could trust them and that this mutual trust might bring about something more.

As a result, the senpai organized the selection interviews for 2001 quite meticulously, and spent hours and hours in discussions to carefully screen the new students to come up with their recommendations. Also, they organized and managed the spring camp 2001 in the university's seminar house in Kiyosato Heights, where the teachers were allotted some time to do their own activities and the students, mostly in English, managed the rest. To us, the teachers, this was an eye-opening change from us having to force them to do things all the time. Although it did not seem to be directly linked to the actual improvement of their English, the changes in their enthusiasm and attitudes toward EPC, their peers and teachers, and most importantly, in their self-esteem, were quite remarkable.

GROUP 2001'S FIRST YEAR-UPS AND DOWNS

As in most cases in the past, Group 2001 seemed to us, the teachers, to be fully motivated and enthusiastic, and things went well for the first semester. We had thought the Group 2000 had done a marvelous job at the camp welcoming them and showing them some good examples, and our classes seemed to be going fine.

However, after summer break, a few students left the program, and toward the end of the year, more students, most of them the top-level students left the program, too. Even after a quite successful autumn camp, the trend did not seem to reverse itself. This could have meant that this group was unable to continue the new “tradition” their *senpais* had created showing strong leadership and conducting various projects more autonomously the next year. All the teachers were then extremely puzzled about this. We thought we had successfully selected the most motivated students, there were good peer influences, and that we were teaching quite well using dramas, conversation strategies, cultural differences, computer-assisted language learning, extensive reading and listening, etc....

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What went wrong, especially in the first year?
2. What were the reasons for the students' sudden upheavals in their motivation levels?
3. What could we do better to link their enthusiasm more directly to the improvement of their English?
4. What are some lessons that we can learn from this experience and how can we apply them into ACE and the English classes at our institution in general?

II. DATA COLLECTION BY TAPED DISCUSSIONS AND INTERVIEWS

GROUP DISCUSSIONS AND INTERVIEWS

I decided to conduct a qualitative analysis by having students discuss their experiences in small groups and videotape them. After analyzing the videotapes, I decided to individually interview three students of various personalities and with different paths of motivational development in order to go even deeper into their individual experiences.

DISCUSSION PROCEDURES

1. Request

In spring 2003, after teaching this group for two years, and just before my sabbatical leave abroad, I asked the group to cooperate with me by tracing back changes in their attitudes,

motivation, and overall atmosphere of the classes by having discussions on these topics in small groups (two to four in each group) videotaping them and taking notes and eventually summarizing their discussions by each group into written form.

2. *Providing a relaxed environment*

They seemed to respond very positively to this request, and during the spring break of 2003, toward the end of their second year, all 14 (eight female, six male) students in the group participated in this project. Eight of them (six female and two male) came to my house, two hours west of Tokyo, and stayed overnight to do this, and others got together on campus. On average, they spent at least two hours discussing, but some of them went on talking for several hours, and in fact, I was told later that some even kept discussing it the whole time on the highway bus on their way back to Tokyo!

They got to videotape at least an hour of their discussion and they manipulated the video camera themselves which was set up on a tripod. I was usually not present except for several minutes per hour when I went in to check in with them to see if they were doing all right and were staying on track. I made it a point to help them relax by doing things such as playing background music and serving them tea at times.

3. *Discussion “facilitating” sheet*

In order to help them structure their discussions, I handed them a sheet of paper, which listed some events/times to look back and reflect on in the chronological order. It looked like this (see Table 1):

Table 1. Discussion facilitating sheet

Changes of attitudes and motivation toward EPC

What became the key factors in the changes?

- Expectations toward the college life (Early April)
 - Impressions of and expectations for EPC (During the orientation, etc.)(April)
 - During the selection process (April)
 - First Class (April)
 - Spring Camp(May)
 - First Semester (April-July)
 - Summer Break (August-September)
 - Second Semester (September-January)
 - Autumn Camp (November/December)
 - Spring Break (February-March)
- ⇒ ⇒ ⇒ ⇒ ⇒ 2nd year (the same cycle)

4. *Other requests and suggestions*

I also asked them to come up with ideas to improve the course and help motivate them even more. I told them that advice for teachers, fellow students, and newcomers would be welcome. I also encouraged them to discuss what could have been done better to steer their enthusiasm toward improving their English, not just doing things together. I encouraged them to talk frankly

about how they felt about anything, and told them that the videos and their content would never be shown or discussed to anyone without their permission. Fortunately, I felt we had developed enough mutual trust for them to be comfortable sharing their true thoughts and feelings.

INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEWS

I selected three people, a rather introverted female, a male leader figure with much overseas experience, and a used-to-be “anti-social” male who was initially feeling strongly against group work or even socializing with his peers. I interviewed them on the phone for one to two hours and took detailed notes of our conversations.

III. SUMMARY OF THE DISCUSSIONS AND INTERVIEWS

A. SUMMARY OF GROUP DISCUSSIONS IN CHRONOLOGICAL ORDER

I took notes on most of the points the students made by watching the video and reading their written summaries of their discussion.

NOTE ABOUT RELATIVELY LITTLE FEEDBACK ON TEACHERS

One thing that struck me when I started taking notes was that the students spoke relatively little of what each teacher did in our classes. I was more than surprised because I had expected to hear that certain things we did had encouraged or hindered them to be autonomous and motivated. I also thought I would get some meaningful findings as to what the EPC teachers could do to promote more autonomy. Instead, I kept hearing about what they were feeling about each other and the group dynamics that they were so concerned about.

One speculation I have for this, is that even though I had taken great care to let the students express their opinions about our classes freely, as I, one of the teachers, was the one to listen to and analyze their feedback, the students might have carefully avoided talking too directly about any teachers’ teaching style or what we actually did, to maintain pleasant and smooth relationships of everyone, the students and as well as teachers involved in EPC.

Another view, which Kevin Mark communicated to me, was that “the students did not have the maturity to appreciate much of what was going on around them: they may focus enthusiastically on certain aspects of the program that are salient to them without understanding their ramifications” (Personal communication, March 3, 2004). I also feel that many students got so euphoric in their peak experience, which was just a few months prior to this data collection that their focus at the time of the interview was mainly on what the students themselves felt and achieved rather than what the teachers did or provided them.

Following is a summary of the much more detailed notes I took. I added some descriptions of what was going on in some of the periods in concern for the readers:

1. EXPECTATIONS TOWARDS UNIVERSITY LIFE IN EARLY APRIL

Various levels and qualities of motivation toward study of English were reported. Some had more intrinsic motivation, others more external. However, overall morale sounded quite high.

2. IMPRESSION AND EXPECTATIONS FOR EPC DURING ORIENTATION, ETC.... (APRIL)

During freshman orientation, we stressed that students should not take EPC casually, saying it was extremely demanding for the few credits they will get.

Too threatening: Many reported that they felt overly threatened by the teachers. Some were also shocked by how fast some of the native speakers spoke to them in English and they could not understand much of what was said. Many were impressed by the senior members, who appeared to be following what was going on. Some were attracted to the demanding aspect of EPC. Others were attracted by the more practical and communicative content of the curriculum than in regular English classes and were looking forward to having teachers who were native speakers.

Looking back, many felt there was too much emphasis of how difficult it would be to be in the course and too little explanation of how actual classes would be conducted, i.e. how much emphasis there would be on group work and collaboration.

3. DURING THE SELECTION PROCESS (APRIL)

The exam to enter the program included: a listening section, a short Japanese essay to identify their motivation, an interview in Japanese (by the senior students), and a group interview in English (by teachers). Applicants were, for instance, instructed to introduce themselves to each other in pairs, and then told to introduce their partner to a third person. We selected the students on the basis of their motivation rather than their English ability. In the end, approximately twice as many people applied than were accepted.

Low confidence: Most of them lost confidence in themselves (and in English?). Most thought they would never get in. Some were impressed by their senior members who helped them to relax and made them feel like asking them anything.

4. THE FIRST CLASS (APRIL)

Three 90-minute classes were taught every week by three teachers, Phil Zitowitz, Kate Ellwood, and me in the first year EPC classes.

High anxiety and tension: Most students reported tremendous levels of anxiety and tension, as they were unable to follow everything in the class, which was mostly conducted in English, and they were also afraid of their peers since they either seemed to have better command of English or they seemed more skilled and assertive in group-situations. Some did not understand what the teachers were expecting of them. Some of the males and females reported that they were afraid of the females, who looked more assertive and confident than the males in this group. At this point, relationships between the students had yet to have formed.

5. THE FIRST YEAR SPRING CAMP (MAY)

Both first- and second-year students participated in the camp that was held at the university's seminar house facing Lake Yamanaka. It was the first time in EPC history that the students themselves (Group 2000, then second-year students) organized the spring camp, not the teachers. The activities were more recreation-oriented rather than academic.

Frustrated with human relationships: Many students were aware that one of the goals of this camp was to familiarize themselves with each other and to get closer. However most felt this was not achieved, although they could see how close their *senpai* (Group 2000) were, and they longed for that kind of relationship with their own peers.

Not ready for group work: Many felt it was too early for them to work in groups as they had not built close enough human relationships with each other to know how much

they could “stand out” and initiate actions, and this became a frustrating factor. It was especially apparent in an activity that had them choreograph a dance sequence. Ironically, the teachers had the intention of giving them such a task to encourage bonding among the students.

6. FIRST YEAR, FIRST SEMESTER (APRIL-JULY)

Receptive and not many human relationships developing: Most reported that the content of the classes was different from what they had expected based on what they had heard in the orientation. Many reported that they were not so happy with the human relationships among the group or the lack thereof. Some also reported that after the camp they felt cut off from the second-year students. Many reported that as they were still receptive in class, there were people who could not express their dissatisfaction, and that led them to lose motivation toward the course. Some suggested that in order to solve this problem of declining motivation after the spring camp, it would have been productive to provide opportunities for the first-year students to participate in presentations and events.

7. FIRST YEAR SUMMER BREAK (AUGUST-SEPTEMBER)

Taking different paths: Most felt that there was no cohesiveness in the group when the first semester finished, and people went ahead and did different things during the summer. Depending on what they did and how they perceived their experiences, their motivation levels toward EPC changed. Some of those who went overseas came back more motivated to learn English, but some others came back less motivated and were consequently attracted to other things or other ways of learning English. Some decided to quit EPC making up their minds on what they really wanted to focus on. Some almost forgot about EPC or could not be bothered when they were asked by e-mail to cooperate with the second-year students’ website project.

8. FIRST YEAR SECOND SEMESTER (SEPTEMBER-JANUARY)

The attendance rate suddenly dropped. Five students had left EPC by December. It was noticeable that most of them were the excellent students.

A major slump: The existence of so many people being absent and quitting led others to lose their motivation. More motivated people were very unhappy with the situation. Many quit because they could not express themselves well about their own dissatisfaction with the classes.

Different motivation groups form: Some students remarked that around that time the class splintered into three categories. The most motivated started feeling, around the time of the autumn camp, that they themselves had to initiate things more autonomously. The less motivated ones felt they had to do what they were told to do. The third group had things that they wanted to do, but as they either found it too difficult to carry their plans out in this group, or felt very unsatisfied about not being given credit for their work or the classes themselves, they left the program without being able to express their opinions.

In the end, there were two groups left: The motivated ones who chose to do debates or speeches for the autumn camp, and the less motivated group who took on the musical, which was a sort of “leftover,” not chosen by the former group. Some chose to be in the less motivated group only because they felt their English level was not high enough

to be in the more motivated group. Some students even started getting together in somebody's house to prepare for their parts in the autumn camp.

9. FIRST YEAR AUTUMN CAMP (NOVEMBER)

It was held at the university's Lake Yamanaka seminar house. The camp was organized by both first- and second-year students. Although the second-year students took the initiative, the first-year students were given complete charge of the activities they were responsible for. Meanwhile, a few students, mostly top-level ones, did not attend the camp, and all of them quit shortly after this despite many of their peers', teachers', and senpais' efforts to persuade them to stay.

Getting closer to each other increases motivation: Most, for the first time, actually found joy in working with others, which motivated them to put more energy into their EPC studies. As many of them ended up staying up all night, sometimes three nights in a row working with their peers before and during the camp to prepare for their activities, they became much closer to each other. Many felt positively influenced by their peers and their seniors by seeing their presentations. Most reported that this camp made them get much closer to each other than before, and this made a significant difference toward pushing up their motivation to speak in English with each other, study it, and devote more time and energy into EPC. Some noted though, that this upheaval in motivation lasted only for a while after the camp.

Non-participants quit feeling left out: Many said that all of the non-participants of the camp quit shortly after the camp only because they did not "give it a try" to do group work and they felt they have been left out even when the participants persuaded them it was never too late. Many of those who did not participate seemed to have made a premature decision that they would never enjoy group work, the students reported. They went on to propose that all the camps should be made absolutely mandatory because of the above reason. Many regretted that they should have tried much harder to persuade them to come to the camp.

10. FIRST YEAR SPRING BREAK (FEBRUARY - MARCH)

Socializing begins: Many started socializing with each other, celebrating birthdays and so on. The mailing list was not there yet, but some started networking. In March, some started working hard toward the selection process, but those who were abroad or had gone back to their hometowns could not participate in this process, and this made a difference in their feelings of commitment to EPC-related activities. Some reported that this long blank period did affect human relationships and motivation levels.

11. SECOND YEAR DURING THE SELECTION PROCESS (APRIL)

Second- and third-year students were in charge of interviewing first- and second-year applicants for EPC. A huge controversy arose concerning the second-year students selection during their discussion after the interviews, and they ended up spending more than 20 hours debating to come to a conclusion.

The biggest turning point: Each member got the opportunity to express their frank opinions feeling responsible for the applicants they were in charge of. *All of them recognized this event as their biggest turning point.* Everybody became so serious when he/she faced the difficulty to judge someone. They became aware of their responsibility to express open-hearted opinions since they had committed to the applicant whom each member was in charge of. Everybody, not just the lead figures, became

independent enough to express his/her own opinion without fear since this experience. The members faced conflicts of different views and opinions. It was the first time they had such uninhibited and frank discussions.

A great controversy over choosing their new peer members forced them to clarify how they envisioned EPC as a learning community, to be and also clarify each member's values: Many admitted that at that stage, the group itself had not developed a strong enough bond, and they were afraid that allowing new members would throw off the fragile balance within the group. Some were strongly against allowing too many people in, and others were against being too exclusive. This led them to clarify what EPC was about and how they wanted it to be. The points of discussion included whether a person's English ability was more important than his/her motivation to study, willingness to cooperate with others, and so on. They realized that they, not just the teachers, had the key to create it and felt extremely responsible for making the right decision. After some very heated and emotional (many were in tears trying to defend for the applicants) debates, they finally came to an agreement. Many reported that after this experience, for the first time, they really got to know each other in depth as they talked so much about their values and beliefs so intensively. Some stated that this experience was invaluable.

12. SECOND YEAR SPRING CAMP (MAY)

This group planned and ran this entire camp at Lake Yamanaka which was attended by the first-, second-, and some third- and fourth-year students with a few teachers and an alumnus who led some activities in given time frames.

Learning to collaborate efficiently: Many reported critical insights on their inefficiency in collaborative work at that point, especially on communicating with one another. They started using their mailing list heavily, sometimes exchanging several e-mails a day. Many also pointed out that the content of the camp could be more academically oriented so that it would be more stimulating for both old timers and new comers alike.

13. SECOND YEAR FIRST SEMESTER (APRIL-JULY)

Major student-initiated collaborative projects, such as debates and presentations started taking place in many of the classes.

Extremely busy, but fun working together: Most reported that all those projects kept them extremely busy week after week, day and night, but they tremendously enjoyed doing them with their peers. EPC became the center of their lives. Many also admitted that one of Professor Kevin Mark's softwares, called Lexispace (see Mark 2003, which outlines this software.) which allowed them to share their diaries and other writings in English, which was rewritten by the teacher, not only helped with their English, but also helped them in getting to know each other better, and this contributed to strengthening their motivation even more.

Unsatisfied with their English: Many, on the other hand, reported as they packed too much into a semester, things never were completed at a truly satisfactory level, especially in terms of accuracy in their English. Many reflected that more cooperation with teachers in terms of scheduling and getting help in English should have been sought for.

14. SECOND YEAR SUMMER BREAK (AUGUST-SEPTEMBER)

The members who stayed in Tokyo during the break did spend time together to work for the website presentation event that was held by the university in October.

Kept in touch and in concern: Unlike the previous summer, people stayed in touch through e-mail, even when they were abroad, and they felt connected with EPC in Tokyo and felt bad that they were not helping those who stayed in country with the website (<http://www.kisc.meiji.ac.jp/~epc/>) project. Many who stayed in Japan the previous summer went abroad largely influenced by their peers who had done so the previous year.

15. SECOND YEAR SECOND SEMESTER (SEPTEMBER-JANUARY)

They became so active that they started creating projects beyond the classroom. These included writing, producing, and performing a court case play in English, making two semi-public presentations of their play, film, news video, and the *Lion King* musical on campus on top of numerous other projects for in-class and camp presentations and execution. (See Mark 2003 for screen shots from the Lexispace software of a cloze exercise using a narrative on *Lion King* that the students had written and photographs from the student performance.) The class provided the members opportunities to meet and have some discipline to speak only in English. They did work completely autonomously or attempted to finish the projects that were proposed by teachers by themselves.

Working to their limits: Everybody worked to or surpassed their limits with many sleepless nights. Many were completely driven. However, there were some gaps in motivation among the group, which they were aware of, and people patiently waited for the less motivated to raise their motivation levels, which in turn was very much appreciated by the initially less motivated ones. Although the group had become extremely efficient working together, rotating leadership roles for different projects, and enjoying the work and the feeling of accomplishment, many were feeling they were doing just too much work, and that their English was not improving as much, as they spoke in Japanese mostly outside the class pressed by time constraints.

16. SECOND YEAR AUTUMN CAMP (NOVEMBER/DECEMBER)

This was held at Lake Yamanaka for three days. It featured not only numerous presentations by small groups but also the murder case court play with an insert of a short film created solely by students, whose production and contents were largely kept secret from the teachers until the night of the performance, which lasted for three hours including audience participation on the verdict which first-year students and teachers were led into by the students. (Kevin Mark and Phillip Zitowitz helped them improve this and had them perform it again on campus along with *The Lion King* and other presentations. See picture 1.) There were some members who did not sleep for the entire week preparing for this. Because of the nature of this extremely intensive and demanding camp, they had a post-camp without teachers at a nearby accommodation just for recreation after the official camp ended.

A peak experience: Most seemed to feel that it was the peak of the whole EPC experience up to this point in time. They felt a high level of sense of accomplishment, but at the same time, some were starting to feel sad that all this was coming to an end soon as they knew, in the following year, the curriculum would not allow them to allocate so much of their time into EPC.

Note by the writer: It was interesting that very few comments were made about this camp. I asked the students later about this, and they said it was so obvious that for everybody it was such an extremely exhilarating, satisfying, and touching experience that they felt there was no need to mention it.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

ON LAGGED IMPROVEMENT OF THEIR ENGLISH

More realistic scheduling and reviewing process necessary: Many admitted that they ended up speaking to each other mostly in Japanese working on their projects due to the time constraints except when they were in class. Things had to be communicated accurately and efficiently when they were working toward deadlines, and this was a big compromise most students had to make. They also reflected that they wanted to spend more time on the completed projects, especially on the accuracy of their English. However, some reported that despite all this, they still thought that their English had improved far better than if they had just studied on their own. Many also stated that most of their other skills in English, except for accuracy, had made a huge leap. Moreover, many admitted that their communicative skills had improved quite a lot and they no longer were inhibited to express themselves in English. It seemed that the more advanced students suffered the most as they had to accommodate the lower linguistic levels of their peers especially in conversation.

Note by the writer: At the time of the writing in autumn 2006, three of these students have completed their MA's in England and one is in an international graduate program in Japan. A couple more have done some graduate level work in the US, and one studied in a university in Sweden as an exchange student for a year during her junior year. Yet, these students presented various levels of English proficiency upon entry into the EPC program. In recent personal communications, many students reported to me that in their junior and senior years, and even after graduation, many students started studying harder to improve their English.

ON GROUP WORK

Students felt it was necessary to cultivate relationships which in turn became the basis for motivation: Most seemed to recognize the importance of group work, which required them to work together outside the class, to be a necessary component in cultivating productive human relationships. Over and over they reported how their excellent relationships with one another contributed to motivating them to put more energy into their work and studies.

Carefully planned introduction is important: However, many also noted that group work should be introduced carefully taking into account the amount and number of difficulties, and that the senior members should support the junior members during this process. Some pointed out that this process was necessary as most students were just not used to collaboration or autonomy in their educational experiences, and it did take some time for them to understand the concepts and get used to actually doing them.

Many tips learned on cooperative skills: Many stressed the importance of sharing responsibilities and rotating jobs and leadership roles so that everybody could experience having jobs of responsibility. They reported that they have improved their cooperative skills so much that they could carry out numerous tasks incredibly efficiently.

GENERAL COMMENTS

Gained life-long friendships and became compassionate toward each other: Many stated that they got to know each other so well and be considerate and compassionate with each other so much that once they decided to do something, they could be one working toward their goal in perfect harmony. They tried to cover up for people who were going through hard times. They studied, struggled, and laughed together, and these memories would stay with them for a long time.

Teachers' and senpai's support and trust were important: Some remarked that a combination of group work, friendship, and teachers' and their senpai's support, contributed to this miraculous upheaval of motivation. Because of the trust and support the teachers and senpais showed them, they could realize some of the dreams they had and create a new tradition of EPC. Their continuous and timely support, praise, and encouragement further led them to carry out even bigger and more challenging projects.

Gained leadership, communicative English skills (especially listening and speaking), presentation skills, and computer skills: Many commented that they learned to think in English and became more fluent. Some stated that the skills they have obtained would stay with them for the rest of their lives. Many also appreciated becoming effective presenters using their drama techniques and computer skills they learned through EPC.

Accelerated human development: Many commented on just how fast they grew as human beings in the two years.

Writer's observation: On many occasions when this group stood next to other groups on and off campus, such as other seminar groups, circles, and clubs, they often looked so much more mature, self-regulated, and confident. This was even the case when compared with groups consisting of older juniors and seniors.

SUGGESTIONS

Showing concern for the first-year students to ease the process in becoming an autonomous and strongly motivated group of learners:

1. More support of and exchanges with the seniors in the first semester, such as introduction of a buddy system, first years' visit to the second years' classes, second years' presentations on what they had done in the first year, etc...
2. More academic stimulus in the first semester and more opportunities for the first-year students to present, such as presentation and discussion events.
3. Encouraging first-year students to develop bonds much earlier by establishing group e-mailing, more group work assignments, and making participation in the camps mandatory.
4. Providing clearer orientation and reasons for activities, such as group work and drama activities so that they would convince the students that these would actually help their improvement in English.
5. More careful and gradual introduction of collaborative activities.
6. More careful coordination of schedules among and between teachers and students.
7. Having their own room to meet and store EPC equipment and materials.

B. SUMMARY OF INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEWS

1. ASAKO NAGASAKA’S (AN INTROVERT) CASE:

Asako has always been a very quiet person. She rarely speaks up in class. Furthermore, she said she had never done collaborative work before. (Although most students must have done some group work during their elementary school years, so many mentioned that they had never worked that way before. I think during their junior and senior high school years, they must have gotten so strongly conditioned to studying individually, often for competition, that they had forgotten their previous group learning experiences.) She joined EPC because she wanted to keep the level of English proficiency she had attained prior to entering Meiji University.

During the first semester, I gradually realized this was a very different course from what I was accustomed to. It was completely new to me. This caused me to be both nervous and curious. During the first semester, there were times when I thought of quitting EPC.

However, the autumn camp in the first year became a turning point. As I learned to integrate different opinions of people, rather than taking an “all or nothing” approach, I began to enjoy group work. And being able to work well with other people became a foundation for me to put my energy into studying English and enjoying it.

In the fall semester in the second year, I even became a sub-leader for the *Lion King* production. My work included scheduling, choreographing, and booking places for rehearsals. People around me (outside EPC) commented to me, “You’ve been doing a big job!!”

Since the time of the interview in spring 2002, although Asako stayed a quiet person, she started expressing herself more confidently in group situations, and cooperated with and sometimes led others in the group.

2. JUN INOUE’S (A LEADER-TYPE) CASE:

Jun had spent some years abroad, and was more fluent in English than most of the others in EPC. To the teachers, he appeared to keep a low profile for most of the first year. However, he did not think so. He said to me that he felt it was just a matter of being given opportunities.

People somehow appointed me to be the leader around the end of the first year. My policy was not to express my own opinions so much, but to make sure everyone, even the quietest in the group would be paid attention to, and to draw out everybody’s opinions. I also thought that once you get the group’s vector into one direction after working out the consensus well, the group can gain unbelievable power to execute things. I thought that’s what might have happened to this group of EPC students.

Although I remained a “general leader” for the whole year, students rotated the leadership role to different people in the second semester in the second year, and it was good, I thought. Everybody had some shining strengths and these opportunities revealed them. Even somebody like Asako became a great leader!

My senpais (senior members) were very kind to me. They would even run to me in times of trouble. On the other hand, I wanted to some day outperform them.

I put a lot of work into perfecting projects by using my computer skills. (Jun was the key person who edited their movie, “The Motive,” among other numerous projects.) I

wanted to reward my peers for making a neat record of their accomplishments and to encourage them to do even a better job the next time.

The miraculous success of EPC came from the compassion people had for one another. People saw goodness in everybody. When somebody came back after a long absence from our work, nobody criticized him/her or even mentioned the fact. The selection process was particularly memorable as they let themselves express their true feelings about important issues, and there were even many tears. After all, we had nothing to hide from each other. Selecting a new member in the group was sensitive stuff. We were nervous about it as we were just becoming a “family.” The group was still so fragile then, and we did not want to break it by letting the wrong person in. That’s why we got so serious and gave deep thought to what we really wanted from EPC, our “other family.” We ARE a family now, and this is such a secure one that we all feel we have a place to come back to any time.

When I look back on the last two years, the most fulfilling classes were the ones we planned and conducted ourselves. I was pretty much fed up with “systematic” classes from my junior and high school days.

If I may make any request of teachers, it is for them to allow students to do what they want when they come up to you for permission. To come to a group consensus to do something together, we required enormous energy and motivation. Denying our chance to do so will only blow out the little flame we finally managed to ignite. So, teachers, please do not turn us off!!

During his senior year, Jun launched an NPO, based in California, providing leadership training programs to students who are internationally-minded. More than 100 students got trained in them, and as of August 1, 2006, it was officially acknowledged as an NPO by in the State of California. In the meantime, Jun obtained a GMAT score of 610 and a TOEFL score of 270, and applied to and was accepted by two graduate schools in the States. In the end, however, he chose to work for an IT company in Japan.

3. TAKESHI KOMOTO’S (AN ANTISOCIAL) CASE:

I remember Takeshi well from our first camp in April 2001, just because I ended up paring up with him in the introduction activity as the number of students were in odd numbers. It was then very hard to communicate with him in English as he was not at all comfortable or capable even in responding to my basic questions, such as “Where are you from?” To be very frank, I did wonder if he could really survive in EPC with that level of oral proficiency.

According to Takeshi, he quickly lost his motivation in EPC in the first year.

I then became lazy. I especially did not like the social aspects of it. I was aware that some people started “doing things” outside classes—celebrating people’s birthdays and so on. I wanted to have nothing to do with all this social stuff, so I stayed away. I was so disinterested in EPC that as late as the beginning of the second year, I could not even remember the name, EPC, after a long break, and was about to quit. When I spoke up to Jun about it, Jun said I was necessary in EPC and wanted me to stay. Another member told me not to give up so easily. Those words shifted something in me.

However, the biggest shift, or rather, a life-changing turning point came during the selection process. As I had a very strong opinion against excluding people from EPC, I kept challenging other members who had opposite opinions. I was very persistent

about it, and this led me to express myself fully in the group for the first time. I felt that I finally was recognized as a member, and felt good being trusted to express my opinions about such an important matter in the program. I believe, without having participated in the 20-hour-long discussions following the selection interviews, my life could have been much more different and boring.

Takeshi changed radically since then, (although contrary to his opinion, the group chose only one person to join EPC after all) and he was fully committed to EPC and its members ever since. Being inspired by some EPC graduates, he applied to participate in the Japan-American Student Conference, which is extremely prestigious and competitive, and he was accepted. He says his experience in EPC of using English so much has helped him greatly in the debates and reading and writing lots of materials. After graduating from Meiji, he now is studying International Relations at Waseda University's graduate school, and he was the one who presented with me in English on behalf of all his other ex-classmates at JALT05. At the time of this writing in the autumn of 2006, I have just heard from him that he was accepted to be a diplomat in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. He told me that as he still has very supportive friends from EPC, even when he is doing a challenging task such as studying for exams, he feels secure, and not too nervous. After a year and a half since graduation, he still comes back from Waseda to Meiji, studies together often with his ex-EPC classmates and his sempai in the group 2000.

IV. POSSIBLE ANSWERS TO THE QUESTIONS

Q1. WHAT WENT WRONG ESPECIALLY IN THE FIRST YEAR?

1. There was too much threatening and not enough concrete explanation, especially on the nature of the collaborative work. This might have scared away students who were autonomous or intrinsically motivated in their learning to begin with.
2. There was a mismatch between the students' expectations and the actual content of the classes.
3. Even though we the teachers were trying to be sensitive to the psychology of the students, we were probably not placing enough attention to how they felt being involved in competition during the selection process, which resulted in some students losing confidence.
4. I think not enough effort was made within the group to foster good human relationships, and this was a partial cause for the unsuccessful group work and low motivation especially in the first semester of the first year.
5. Although, again, teachers had felt they were being sensitive enough, collaborative work was introduced apparently too soon before there was a good understanding on the part of the students on what it was and also before they could establish good human relationships with one another. In the field of group dynamics, it is widely known that in the initial group-forming stage, people often behave as if they are not stressed or nervous in the new group even if they actually were (See Oyster 2000 cited in Morimoto 2005a).
6. Not enough effort was made to keep the group together for EPC during long breaks.
7. The importance of participation in the camps, which were major events in the development of the human relationships, was overlooked, and this resulted in all of the non-participants quitting in the end.

Q2. WHAT WERE THE KEYS FOR THE STUDENTS' SUDDEN UPHEAVALS IN THEIR MOTIVATIONAL LEVELS?

I categorized them into four main factors:

1. Agapeic and secure climate which was fostered successfully in group dynamics;
2. Empowerment, which occurred as a result of being given some control over student selection, curriculum, and classroom decisions;
3. Opportunities to perform in front of others; and
4. Enjoyment, higher self-esteem, creativity, and senses of accomplishment, responsibility, and competence.

These factors seemed to be developed and fostered by the following elements dynamically interacting with each other:

- a. Close human relationships among the group.
- b. Experiencing joy in group work and being creative.
- c. Feeling trusted and supported by the teachers.
- d. Feeling trusted and supported by their peers.
- e. Having opportunities to express themselves fully among the group.
- f. Feeling secure -- having a family of friends.
- g. Feeling responsible for the control they were given.
- h. Compassion for their peers.
- i. Desire to help the junior members through their process of developing autonomy, motivation, and an agapeic climate.
- j. Having and creating opportunities to present what they had achieved to others outside the classroom.
- k. Desire to perform well in front of their peers, senior members, junior members, EPC teachers, and other members of the larger campus community, which included their teachers, administrators, friends, and so forth.
- l. Feeling competent in communicative skills in English.
- m. Feeling competent in cooperative and interpersonal skills.

Q3. WHAT COULD WE DO BETTER TO LINK THEIR ENTHUSIASM MORE DIRECTLY TO IMPROVEMENT OF THEIR ENGLISH?

As many students suggested, their perceived competence in English improved in general for two exceptions. More advanced students, especially the ones who were quite fluent speakers did not feel their English improved much, and some even reported that their TOEFL scores worsened. Also, most reported that they were uncertain if the English they were using in all those projects was accurate or not. This is quite apparent when we look at what they have written on their website (EPC Group 2001, 2002), for instance. Consequently, they perceived that their grammatical skills did not improve much.

Furthermore, there is one more important question we should pose here. When the students talked about their motivation, was it about studying English, or general attitude toward participation in EPC related activities? Reading and listening to the students' comments over and over, I feel there is no straight forward answer to this.

As I have attempted to explain above in the answer to Q3, it seems that many had more instrumental or external motivation to study in the beginning and then more internal motivation to participate in activities started to settle in. Maybe their motivation for more formal study might have decreased as many of the activities were not so directly related to English itself, such as the sewing of the costumes for their play, and the learning of how to handle equipment and computer software. However, this does not necessarily mean that they were disinterested in learning and/or speaking in English, as had they been in an ESL situation, where there was a necessity to communicate in English, it was likely that they had done most of their work using English. Some students confirmed this assumption by saying that they wanted to speak English all the time, but they could not just afford to do that under the time restraints, and that they were frustrated that although they enjoyed working together, they were spending all this time and energy for something which was not directly related to the improvement of their English.

Another way of analyzing this might be to shift the focus in the content of their learning experience from being language-oriented to more content- and project-oriented. In other words, we succeeded in strengthening their motivation perhaps partially due to a more content-oriented focus, but we also failed in keeping the link between the content and the target language due to time constraints and the linguistic environment. It might be correct to say that we did not provide a safe and appropriate enough environment for the learners to keep using English for their collaborative work.

Therefore, I propose the following answers to Q3:

1. More time for preparation for each project should be allocated so that students will feel secure to take time in communicating in English with each other.
2. Review/rewrite sessions with a teacher or a native speaker assistant/editor should be scheduled before and after each execution of a project. An opportunity for a second or final version of the presentation may be helpful to keep the students' focus and motivation for improvement.
3. Although teachers often oversaw the out-of-class activities, more presence of a teacher and/or a native or near-native speaker assistant in those activities may be beneficial for students to check their accuracy of their English and to be encouraged to communicate in English, provided that their autonomy is well respected. However, as students become more and more productive, the teachers cannot possibly keep up with all the editing needs for their performance and publications. (Note that their website alone consists of perhaps more than 40 pages of student English!!) Therefore, I agree with my colleague, Kevin Mark's proposal that the university outsources editors for this need, especially now that we have approximately 200 students enrolled in the ACE program, yet there are only five teachers (who also teach more students or classes outside the program).
4. Special attention should be given to the more fluent learners whose fluency level is high but accuracy is not. It seems it is them who “suffer” most from not getting much out of the EPC projects, many of which turn out to be more fluency- than accuracy-focused for the reasons mentioned above. Perhaps we could encourage these students to take more demanding roles in each project, which will in turn require them to focus on accuracy in longer narratives and writings than in other projects.
5. Sharing of teacher-edited learner diary entries, using Lexispace, one of the programs in the TRIO series by Kevin Mark (See Mark 2001 for the outline of this TRIO project.), mentioned earlier, used in his class seems to be extremely effective in improving students' perceived sense of accuracy as well as creating bonding with each other. I recommend the use of this at a much earlier stage, which ACE now does, and perhaps sharing it with senior members after a certain point in time.

Q4. WHAT ARE SOME LESSONS THAT WE CAN LEARN FROM THIS EXPERIENCE AND HOW COULD WE APPLY THEM INTO ACE AND UNIVERSITY ENGLISH CLASSES IN GENERAL?***1. The importance of group dynamics***

We have learned that group dynamics should not ever be underestimated for development of autonomy and motivation. As Murphey (2003) points out, “we learn autonomy in groups” (p.6), and security is the foundation of autonomy. Only after learners feel totally secure within their group, will they feel safe enough to explore and be creative. As many students commented, for them, EPC had become a secure family that they could always come back to.

As I mentioned earlier, I read Dörnyei and Murphey’s book (2003) soon after I finished most of the work for this paper, and that led me to further analyze the data collected here using group dynamic principles, especially on the group formation process of EPC 2001. The results of the analysis have been presented and published (Morimoto, 2004, 2005a, 2005b).

2. Socialization and introduction to collaborative work

Socializing and gradual introduction of collaborative work supported by teachers and senior students seemed to be essential for a group to bond and to become an incubator for autonomy, commitment, and higher motivation. Therefore, I propose that more classes be taught intensively, preferably including overnight camps where everybody gets “locked” into studying and socializing.

3. Scheduling social events carefully

In order to nurture the human relationships within the group, socializing opportunities should be carefully scheduled to prevent people from feeling left out only because they could not participate in them due to scheduling conflicts. The presence of supportive senior students can be extremely helpful, too. Special care should be taken for the timing of camps for this reason.

4. Individual attention

Especially in the initial stages, teachers’ seniors’ and peers’ trust, support, and gradual orientation are essential for learners to do any collaborative work well, and care should be given to each individual, not just the whole group, until the group itself starts doing this job on its own.

5. Performance factors

With regard to the 2001 group, every opportunity to perform in front of others (outside of their own group) seemed to inflate their already high and intrinsic motivation levels, and the students themselves seemed to know that adding causes for strengthening their motivation levels would continue as they kept creating such performance opportunities. Therefore, I strongly recommend the use of performances and publications, including web-based ones, to strengthen students’ motivation and sense of accomplishment.

6. Use of Lexispace

One of the greatest ways, which addresses to all the factors mentioned above, and also being raved by the students was the use of software called Lexispace, which let student-generated writing become a learning material to be circulated via e-mails among the learning group. As it not only addressed the social and psychological needs of the students, but also their linguistic needs (and being applicable even in larger class situations), I recommend the use of this software more extensively.

7. On empowerment

As learners in Japan are especially not accustomed to being trusted by authorities to take charge in almost anything in the educational setting (See Head, 2006, this volume), empowering them this way can have a massive impact on the part of the students, especially in terms of their self-esteem and sense of responsibility. Sometimes, students may misunderstand the appropriate use of their gained control, and in those instances, it may be a good idea for the teacher and/or senior students to intervene and guide them. At the same time, in some cases, it could become a life-changing event as was recounted in Takeshi Komoto's case.

Furthermore, I have seen many senior students, or senpais going out of their way to encourage the new students to be more autonomous. One member of EPC2001, now a graduate student, for example, came into my ACE second year class a few times in the first semester this year, showed them some clips from the digital films that they created, including the one they made for JALT2004, and offered Q&A sessions on how to be more autonomous and collaborative as a learning group and in general concerning their coming years and job-hunting. These interventions have obviously empowered some of the current students, and they held their own English camps during the summer break and started English discussion gatherings with their senpais.

Also, as I discussed earlier, although students did not mention this so much in the interviews, I also do feel that we, the teachers, must have been creating a safe enough climate for the students to be bold enough to be this autonomous. Although some of the group activities we had them do might have been introduced too early or just too challenging in the first years, I feel activities such as drama, film-making, and material development projects that the EPC teachers facilitated with were quite appropriate, and encouraged the students to be more collaborative and autonomous.

8. An “English-speaking zone”

If there could be more institutional support, it might be extremely beneficial for learners to have an “English-speaking zone,” which might work hand in hand with self-access learning centers, libraries, media centers, and so on. In such a zone, everybody is expected to communicate only in English, and some English speaking learning advisers may be positioned. Such people may be employed part-time from a pool of graduate and undergraduate students who are native or near-native speakers of English, and some training for their facilitation work should be offered. This zone can be one of the primary spaces outside the classroom to carry out collaborative activities.

9. Learning cooperative skills

Even after the whole group bonds and becomes motivated, being able to work efficiently with each other is yet another thing, and can take time for them to learn such skills. As Benson (2001) states, “Autonomy implies not only that learners attempt to take control of their own learning from time to time, but that they possess the capacity to do so systematically.” Thus, teachers should have patience and allow for this to brew, and scheduling and curriculum should be developed with this factor in mind.

10. Possibility for English to be a human development subject

Both the students' and teachers' observations seem to show that the students have developed tremendously in the two years as a result of the intense collaborative work. Johnson and Johnson (1999) seem to support this view as they point out that when there is successful cooperative learning, evidences shows that students achieve higher goals, build more positive and supportive relationships, and develop better psychological health. Thus, just as in any

subject matter, English has a good potential to be a human development subject when autonomy is encouraged through collaborative work.

11. Acceptance of a shift in the teacher's role

The teacher's role, once autonomy is well established, becomes more of an ethnographer's studying students (Murphey, 2003) as well as of a mentor's in my opinion. Carl Rogers (1983) stated that:

... the attitude of the facilitator has almost entirely to do with the climate, "How can I create a psychological climate in which the child will feel free to be curious, will feel free to make mistakes, will feel free to learn from the environment, from fellow students, from me, from experience?" (p.136)

I agree with his view on a teacher as a facilitator fostering the climate. Furthermore, when the group, as seen in EPC group 2001, gets to the point of autonomy they reached, it seems many of them start taking on even this facilitator's role, as mentioned above in item 7 in this section. This rather dramatic role change may be challenging for some teachers, and this aspect should be well understood by the teacher before s/he decides to encourage autonomy with his/her students. There is more discussion on this point in my other paper (Morimoto, 2005) much based on works in group dynamics in general, and Murphey's work applying the group dynamics model of autocratic, democratic, and autonomy-inviting teacher leader modes into the language classroom setting (Murphey, 2003).

11. Faculty development in the area of Group Dynamics

We have found throughout this study how important group dynamics are in developing autonomy through collaborative work, and I see the need for us to smoothly bring classes and groups into conducting collaborative work. However, very few of us language teachers are trained in this area. It may be extremely helpful for the teachers to be trained, or at least informed of in the area of group dynamics in order to foster autonomy in our classrooms.

Moreover, in the present university situations in Japan, not only in English classes, but also in all subject areas, there is a general trend where many students stop coming to classes soon after their entrance. In worse cases, there are reports about them turning into "shut-ins" and NEETs, and even about frequent suicidal attempts. According to my personal experiences with some students, and also from what we often hear from our university's student counseling office, a feeling of isolation seems to play one of the major roles in this phenomenon. I foresee that there will be increased need and demand for at least some teachers in each university to be trained in group dynamics so they can guide new students more smoothly into the campus community.

CONCLUSIONS

In this paper, based on taped student discussions and interviews, I have attempted to analyze the reasons why the EPC group 2001 experienced a major slump followed by a seemingly sudden upheaval in their motivational levels in their first two years of the program. I found that senses of compassion, empowerment, and joy fostered in the group seemed to play major roles as well as the opportunities to present their achievements to others outside their class in raising their motivation. We also learned that a successful collaborative work not only brings about autonomy and stronger bonding within the group, but also seems to bring about much more, such as higher self-esteem, higher achievement, and greater senses of happiness and security. On the other hand, in the initial stage, teachers and senior students, if they are involved, should be extremely sensitive to the group dynamics as well as the smooth

introduction of all collaborative work, which to many students can be a completely new concept of learning after being conditioned in the Japanese secondary education system to be receptive studying individually often for competition, not for cooperation. Because of its strong influence on leaning experiences and human development, I feel that more university teachers should be trained in the area of group dynamics. In terms of improvement of English, we felt that providing a safer and more appropriate environment for using English in students' collaborative work outside the class is called for to keep the content-oriented projects linked to the constant usage of English as means of communication.

There are numerous topics and methods for further research that I feel could be explored with this case of EPC group 2001. I feel I should also interview those who dropped out in the first year, which actually some of my students suggested to me. Also, a longitudinal study on the group, following them for at least a decade to see how their experience in EPC will have influenced their academic, professional, and personal lives might reveal some more profound factors. Another possibility is to look at how extrinsic motivational causes such as: attendance policies, grading, exams, and so on, played roles in their motivational development. Furthermore, in the new ACE program, we are already trying to address many of the issues raised in this paper, and I hope to start conducting another research on ACE students.

FINAL REMARKS

Throughout this study, which began more than four years ago in my house, in a snowy Yatsugatake, having the students discuss their experiences in front of a video camera, I have always felt supported by the students' positive attitudes, passion for EPC, and compassion for one another, their juniors, senpais, and to us, the teachers, which were permeating in their words, happy faces, and their laughter recorded on the videos. Even though some of these former students now are thousands of miles away studying or working in various parts of the world, I feel connected to them as we still often exchange emails and even get to meet them all over in and outside of Japan. It has been the primal motivation to write this paper, to thank them for letting me share their precious experiences with interested readers and teachers like you and learn from it so I can apply what I learned with the generations of learners to come. I also came to realize how important “relatedness” is in almost all faces of our lives as a prerequisite for becoming autonomous and independent in the true sense, and I now can see much more clearly the importance of being connected to my colleagues and people who share similar ideas as in The Learner Development Special Interest Group of JALT. I hope this paper has provided some encouragement and insights for you to “get your students hooked,” and act as a starting point for our exchange of ideas in the future.

Personally, doing this research has been a transformational experience of its own. One particular change is in my attitude toward my professional goals. For me, it's no longer just helping people learn English, but facilitating them to enjoy learning it in an environment where they can easily relate to and bond with others as they wish, and become truly autonomous learners always having the choice to collaborate with others if they wish. I feel there is a tremendous difference between people who appear to be independent and autonomous without being able to relate with others well and the ones who are autonomous by choice. Having the choice to relate to others well and be supported by them at anytime, the latter kind of people, the kind represented by the graduates of EPC 2001, seem to appear much happier and mentally healthier to me, and I do hope to be like them myself and facilitate my students in that direction, if they allow me to. After all, I don't think I will ever be the same teacher or person as I was in April of 2001.

CRITICAL READER RESPONSES 1

JUANITA HEIGHAM

As a teacher who has had her fair share of ups and downs in the classroom, I appreciated reading Yoko's sincere account of this remarkable episode in her teaching life. While there are many points I'd like to discuss, I'll limit myself to three. The first is how Yoko saw English development as somewhat secondary to students' "development as happy human beings who are capable of working with others." She was clearly moved by the changes she witnessed in her students but disappointed that their work together didn't focus more on developing their English. She saw the students' autonomy grow, but that autonomy didn't seem to greatly impact their learning of English.

When I read this, I felt a familiar pang. I also try to promote autonomy in my classroom, and one way that I do it is by using collaborative projects. Usually, the introduction of these projects results in students taking control of some aspects of their learning. However, those aspects aren't always as tightly linked to English as I'd like. I have watched students be empowered and transformed, have seen their communicative confidence soar only to be devastated when they got TOEIC results indicating that they hadn't made much "improvement." Undeniably their English had improved, but not in a way that showed up on a standardized test (yet). I like to think the autonomy my students develop will ultimately allow them to take control of their learning of English in a way that improves those ever-so-important test scores. However, as scandalous as it may sound, if I had to choose between students' growth in autonomy or English, I'd have to choose autonomy, but like Yoko, I'd like to see the development of the two rapidly conjoin.

Another interesting point was how Yoko highlighted the importance of community in learning. Of the four points that she listed as factors that impacted students' motivation, three were related to interacting with others. As Fried-Booth states, "even the most reluctant, skeptical learner is susceptible to peer group enthusiasm and derives benefit from taking part in a project" (2002, p. 7). With Yoko's students, once the flame (finally) took, they were unstoppable. Haven't we all witnessed something like this? The phenomenon of a particular class inexplicably becoming eager and vivacious while others remain nearly lifeless? When we look at those singular classes, what we see, among other things, is notable bonds among students. Yet, few of us put considerable energy into building those bonds; we have a "get-to-know-you activity" on the first day and then get down to the business. Perhaps we can learn from Yoko's students. We might find that we will better promote our students' learning if we give them additional time to get to know each other before we launch into our curriculum, or if we build activities into our curriculum designed to help students continue to grow to know one another throughout a course. Building relationships is an ongoing process, so why do we think we can get it taken care of in 90 minutes or less?

The last thing that I'd like to discuss is Yoko's thought that teachers in Japan could benefit from training in group dynamics. While I'm sure that could help many, I'd rather see the training focus on the development of learner-centered teaching methods or better yet, on the development of learner and teacher autonomy. If more teachers in Japan were fostering autonomy in their classrooms, then their students would be supported in ways that might just give rise to growth in both their English language skills and their development as happy human beings.

STEVE BROWN

Laurence Olivier, arguably the greatest stage and film actor of the twentieth century was a notorious perfectionist. There is a story about one particular performance which was, in the view of everyone in the theatre -- audience, cast, backstage crew -- quite masterful. After the curtain call, however, he stormed backstage to his dressing room, flung the door open and, glaring in the mirror, banged his fists on the table.

A fellow actor, puzzled by his reaction, followed him into his room.

"Larry, what's wrong? You were brilliant, perfect -- it was as good as it could possibly be."

"I know," Olivier replied. "That's the problem. Why was it perfect? Why isn't it always like that?"

Now, whether this story is true or not I don't know, but I was reminded of it as I read of Yoko Morimoto's students' 'resurrection' into a happy, enthusiastic, and apparently autonomous learning community, after a period where the group almost fell apart. Yoko rightly asks herself what went wrong during the first part of the programme, but the questions that really fascinate me are about the later success. Why? Why, as Olivier asked, isn't it always like that?

I'm sure most of us have been in situations where we feel we've done everything right - class preparation, materials, activities, allowing space for the students to interact, our own engagement with them -- but somehow the lesson doesn't quite click. Then, on another day, we prepare in exactly the same way, engage with students as we always do . . . and the class is a glittering success: students are engaged in their learning and with each other, we can see them progress in front of us.

Why? Why isn't it always like that?

Why this time and not others? What did I do right?

I'm not sure if it's ever possible to find a definitive answer to these kinds of question, but the important thing is to keep asking them, and to realize that when something goes well, it's probably because of the students, not because of us! Yoko's tentative answer seems to be grounded in the issue of group dynamics: the working together, her students' willingness to engage in an interactive learning process, their 'compassion for one another'. As Vieira (2006) suggests, perhaps 'we do not need to *fulfill* a vision of . . . empowerment: we need to *construct* it collaboratively.' It's not the 'vision' (of autonomy, or language acquisition, say) that counts, nor what we do as teachers, but what our learners do and what we can help them to do *together*.

Our task, then, is to keep working with our learners, helping them to construct their own knowledge and move forward collaboratively and, in order to do that, to keep asking ourselves the same questions.

Why? Why isn't it always like that?

CRITICAL READER RESPONSE 2

JODIE STEPHENSON

As a teacher who is interested in promoting positive group dynamics and supporting autonomous learning, and as someone who now teaches in the ACE program that succeeded the EPC program mentioned in this chapter, I read “How we got hooked” with great interest.

I was extremely impressed by the change exhibited by Yoko’s students. They changed from students who were lacking motivation and confidence, and who were struggling with interpersonal relationships, to a competent and cohesive group of very motivated students who spent hours out of class each week on projects that they initiated and directed. Likewise, the dedication of Yoko and her colleagues and the staff in the media centre is to be applauded. They, too, spent many hours outside of class time and normal working hours to provide support for the students.

The experiences reported in this chapter show how being given choice and responsibility can truly motivate and energize learners, teachers and staff to do much more than they normally would. When given choice, people become more involved and invested in what they are doing (Deci & Flaste, 1995). They can enter a state of flow, where they find enjoyment in what they are doing, and that enjoyment is its own reward and further stimulates intrinsic motivation (Deci & Flaste, 1995; Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). Indeed, this was something that my classmates and I experienced in a post-graduate course designed to foster autonomy (Kohyama, Stephenson, & Jorgenson, 2002).

As I read this chapter, I was also reminded of the complex interaction of factors involved in fostering autonomous learning. Not only do students need to be given choices, but they also need to feel confident and competent, and comfortable enough with their classmates to take advantage of the opportunities afforded them. This process may take some time, as in the case of Yoko’s students. The implication for individual teachers and educational institutions is that if we truly aim to foster autonomy, then we need to allow enough time for it to develop.

This study also indicates that teachers need to really listen to students and to actively seek ways of allowing each student’s voice to be heard, perhaps by using feedback questionnaires or reflection journals (Stephenson, this volume). If students do not feel that teachers listen to or value their opinions, they may become disenchanted, demotivated, and in extreme cases even drop out, as some EPC students did.

It may not be feasible or even desirable for readers to expect such dramatic changes in their own students. For example, most teachers may not expect students’ (and perhaps even their own) lives to revolve around their English classes. However, the changes in the attitudes and behaviour of Yoko’s students, and the level of autonomy that they displayed, is very impressive. For this reason, this chapter contains inspiration and much food for thought, even for teachers in very different contexts.