

From English for Evaluation to English for Communication: Encouraging Authentic Language Use in the Classroom

Opening Remarks

Good afternoon ladies and gentlemen, colleagues, special guests. It is truly a pleasure to be here speaking to you today. I would like to thank the organizers of this event for the wonderful job they have done in bringing us all together here. I strongly believe that professional development is an important part of being a successful teacher. As such, I commend all of you here today for your commitment and your dedication to your chosen profession. Congratulations.

Today I would like to talk to you about ways that you can move away from teaching English as a subject for evaluation and move toward teaching English as a language for communication. Specifically, I plan to present four concepts on which you can focus to help you make this shift in your classroom and in your teaching. **[SLIDE]** In the order of their presentation, these four areas are: *social presence*, *interaction*, *collaborative learning*, and *learner-centered instruction*. **[SLIDE]** For each of these four elements I will first, define the term,

then explain the principles behind the concept, then offer suggested operational activities, and then conclude with a brief review.

My discussion today is framed by what I think are three important questions facing English teachers in Korea. **[SLIDE]** First, “What is the purpose of language?” Second, “What is the purpose of English in Korea?” And third, “What is the purpose of English in my classroom?” It is the conflict between these first two issues and the need to strike a balance with the third that presents the greatest challenge to English teachers in Korea. I hope that the theories and suggestions presented today will enable you to find that balance.

All the information presented today, including my presentation paper, presentation notes, and this Power Point slide show will be available for download from my personal homepage and I will give you that address near the end of the presentation. **[SLIDE]**

I. Social Presence

Definition – What is it?

Social presence is a very dynamic quality and will differ depending on the choice of materials, the activities used to engage learners, and depending on the very learners themselves. For the purpose of this discussion, social presence will be defined as: “The dynamic sense of community characterized by the occurrence of familiarity and closeness between participants in a system.” In the case of English classes in Korea, the system’s participants are likely to include just two groups: the instructor and the students. To obtain effective social presence in the classroom, all participants in the system must share in the responsibility of creating social presence. Having said this however, the role of the instructor is more demanding than that of other participants and carries with it higher levels of responsibility for establishing and maintaining the discourse that creates and sustains social presence (Rouke, et. al., 2001). The key words to remember here are *establishing* and *maintaining*. The instructor must play the

role of facilitator in helping to achieve and then preserve social presence, but never dominate the system. [SLIDE]

Principles – Why is it important?

Now that we have established a working definition for this concept, we must ask ourselves, “What is the importance of social presence?”

If we consider that social interaction is a basic human need, a contributing factor to successful learning outcomes, and the primary function of language, then the importance of social presence in the classroom becomes quite clear. To ensure effective learning and authentic use of language, students must be made to feel as though they ‘belong’ in the classroom. Further, social presence is essential because it has been shown that without this feeling of ‘belonging’ in the classroom, students are reluctant to take the necessary risks involved with learning. Students need to feel a sense of community before they are willing to open up and express ideas, evaluate peers, and put themselves at risk of being evaluated by their peers (Kreijns et al., 2002). Lastly, as social presence sets the stage for greater interaction among students, it also is related to greater course

satisfaction for both students *and* instructors. (Picciano, 2002)

[SLIDE]

Operational Activities – How can I do that?

There are many ways that social presence can be incorporated into English classes in Korea. One very effective way is to make students aware of the importance of social presence. To do this, include a discussion and/or reading on the importance of community building in learning (Brown, 2001). If you really want to build social presence in your classroom, you must first teach the concept to your students. Other effective methods to create social presence include creating areas in the classroom (and/or online) for students to post pictures and biographies of themselves and of the instructor; choosing classroom activities that are purely social as opposed to purely academic and that allow students to use English in a setting that is familiar and comfortable; and having students create, and more importantly present, weekly reflections on what and how they have contributed to the community.

Creating social presence in your classroom is a relatively simple procedure, but it does take some careful planning and attention to detail. Try to create an environment that makes your students feel that they *want to* attend class rather than that they *have to*. One method with which I have had success in doing this is to have students create nametags that I later post in the classroom. This procedure is an extension of the traditional first-day-of-class partner interview activity. But, by creating nametags for their partner based on their interviews, students create something tangible (the nametags) while also creating social presence in the classroom. These nametags also help the teacher (and other students) to remember each other's name; remembering and using names in the classroom is another effective way of building and maintaining social presence. In addition, when learners see their English names (or Korean names written in English) posted in the classroom, it helps to reinforce their English identity, which in turn adds to the sense of community, or social presence, of the group.

With this activity you may find that some nametags are very basic, [SLIDE] while others are more detailed [SLIDE] [SLIDE]. While

these differences could make some learners feel anxious about their nametag, once they are hung on the wall the focus shifts away from individuals and moves toward the group. Have the students put their nametags on their desks for the first few weeks of the semester before collecting them and hanging them on the wall. Once the nametags are hung on the wall, some classes may take to decorating their nametags further. This is both desirable and encouraged as it further establishes social presence and a sense of ownership in the classroom.

[SLIDE] [SLIDE] [SLIDE]

Another simple but effective technique to build social presence is to hang a calendar near the door. In addition to posting important due dates and holidays, invite and encourage students to write their birthdays or other special events on the calendar. **[SLIDE]** Whenever there is a special day, make an announcement before the start of class; if the situation warrants, prepare a small gift or prize.

To maintain social presence outside the context of lessons, develop an ‘English Corner’. Invite learners to form creative phrases or sentences in English using words posted in a corner of the whiteboard. **[SLIDE]**

Periodically throughout the semester, add new words to the board so that learners can continue to make new phrases or sentences. [SLIDE] Particularly interesting or creative works can be submitted for publication in the school newspaper, yearbook or other student publications. [SLIDE]

Finally, make an effort to change something in the classroom everyday. This does not mean just changing the position of an existing object (although this can be effective), but instead bringing something new to the classroom everyday. [SLIDE] The rationale behind this practice is to pique learners' curiosity and interest in their classroom. The items that you bring to the room do not always have to be related to the lesson, but instead can be of some personal interest to you. [SLIDE] As Jeremy Harmer (1997) points out in his book, How to Teach English, students like a teacher who has his own personality and willingly shares this personality with the students. [SLIDE]

Review:

Social presence is the sense of togetherness created in the classroom by both the instructor and the students. Social presence can help to achieve better results in the classroom because it makes everyone feel

more comfortable. If students feel more comfortable in the classroom then they are more likely to achieve lesson objectives and be active learners who take chances. Teachers can facilitate social presence in many ways, including making students aware of social presence, creating spaces for students to express themselves in English, choosing activities that encourage English conversation in non-threatening environments and situations, and by having students reflect on exactly what they have done to contribute to the group.

[SLIDE]

II. Interaction

Definition – What is it?

While the concept of social presence is somewhat abstract, the concept of interaction is to some extent more concrete. For this discussion, interaction will be defined as, “The mechanical, intellectual, and social tasks that students undertake to incorporate new content with prior knowledge.” Mechanical tasks refer to physical processes, intellectual tasks refer to mental processes, and social tasks refer to four separate interactions: learner-to-media (how

learners react to the method of instruction), learner-to-content (appropriateness of the course material considering the objectives and the learners), learner-to-instructor (types of communication, feedback, access, support, etc.), and learner-to-learner (communication, feedback, support, and dialogue between students). My discussion today will focus mainly on the latter two types: learner-to-instructor and learner-to-learner. [SLIDE]

Principles – Why is it important?

Since social interaction is a fundamental means of knowledge building and enriches the learning community (Ragen, 1995) interaction is, in itself, another effective way to increase social presence. Another important point to consider is that high levels of interaction are associated with quality learning experiences (Curtis and Lawson, 2001). Increase the amount of interaction in the classroom and you are virtually guaranteed to increase the quality of the learning experience. Considering these two points, it is easy to see that the classroom environment must be an interactive environment, and not one that is dominated by the instructor leaving the learners to be passive spectators in the lesson. [SLIDE]

Operational Activities – How can I do that?

To increase the amount of interaction within your classroom, it is important to include collaborative learning tasks as part of student evaluation and assessment. Make being interactive a required part of earning a grade in the class. In addition, clearly expressing your expectations regarding student participation at the beginning of the semester is a very simple, yet very effective, way of ensuring greater interaction. Lastly, be prepared to act as a facilitator and a guide rather than the source of knowledge in class discussions. Students cannot interact if they are not given the chance! **[SLIDE]**

Review:

Interaction is the way in which students incorporate new information into their existing knowledge. While interaction involves several different processes, our discussion today has focused on social interaction, specifically learner-to-instructor and learner-to-learner interaction. Increasing interaction has been shown to increase the quality of learning in the classroom. Teachers can increase interaction in the classroom by assigning a portion of the students' final grade to

participation, by letting students know that you expect them to participate and that a portion of their grade will be determined by their participation, and by acting as a facilitator in discussions and activities.

[SLIDE]

III. COLLABORATIVE LEARNING

Definition – What is it?

As with the other elements discussed today, there are many variations in the definition of collaborative learning. Some research uses the term ‘collaborative’ to describe any situation involving group-based activities. Others distinguish ‘collaborative’ activities (working together to achieve a common goal or output) from ‘cooperative’ activities (working together to achieve individual goals). For the purpose of today’s discussion, collaborative learning will be defined as, “learning activities that involve students communicating, cooperating, and collaborating with others in the production of personal and group knowledge.” Collaborative learning is not just having students sitting together in groups learning about an assigned topic. Instead, collaborative learning is having students actually

working together, and building knowledge for themselves and for the group. [SLIDE]

Principles – Why is it important?

Lessons that employ collaborative learning techniques facilitate learning by encouraging students to reflect and by enabling the social construction of knowledge. In order to ‘digest’ new information, learners need to construct their knowledge by acting on it, reformulating it, making their own personal interpretation of it, sharing it with others, and then building on these ideas and concepts through the reactions and responses of their peers. Collaborative learning allows learners to bring additional knowledge and skills that are not available through teacher-provided activities. A classroom full of students is perhaps the greatest resource available to a teacher; do not be hesitant to use the students as resources in their own learning. Lastly, while it does not apply to all classrooms, collaborative learning can provide an authentic environment for the development of workplace skills. Many workplaces require skills in working collaboratively with others. [SLIDE]

Operational Activities – How can I do that?

To take full advantage of collaborative learning, teachers need to establish an environment that promotes collaboration and also provide students with background knowledge about its use. As with any of the elements discussed today, they will work best if students are introduced briefly to the concepts. In trying to establish the proper environment, instructors must use a wide range of collaborative activities, while considering issues such as social presence, group sizes, and the timing of planned interaction activities. Lastly, keeping an anecdotal account of students' participation in activities and discussions as the basis for further activities is another way to utilize collaborative learning in the classroom. [SLIDE]

Review:

Collaborative learning involves groups of students actively participating together to construct common personal and group knowledge. The importance of this type of learning is that it helps students to reflect on what they have learned, and by doing so, it helps students to better internalize what they have learned. Collaborative

learning also allows students to ‘personalize’ their experience in the classroom by bringing supplementary information and abilities to the lesson that would not normally come from traditional instruction techniques. Teachers who would like to use collaborative learning in the classroom must inform students of the methods and benefits of collaborative learning. In addition, teachers must plan collaborative lessons paying specific attention to factors such as social presence, group size, and interaction timing. Lastly, teachers can keep a record of a student’s participation in activities and discussions and then incorporate that record into future lessons and activities. [SLIDE]

IV. LEARNER-CENTERED INSTRUCTION

Definition – What is it?

In its broadest sense, learner-centered instruction might be equated with learner-managed learning which has been defined as, “any learning situation in which the learner exercises considerable control over key aspects of learning, including: what it is for; what it contains; how it is learnt; how progress is monitored; or how achievement is reported.” However, for today’s discussion, learner-centered

instruction will be defined as, “instruction that places the emphasis on the learner and the learning process as opposed to on the teacher and on the teaching process.”

Principles – Why is it important?

Current research suggests that learners must ‘construct’ their own knowledge base by building on their existing knowledge and skills. As such, more effective learning will result from instruction that focuses on students and encourages their active and reflective participation in the learning process. With this fact in mind, the importance of learner-centered instruction cannot be overlooked. Planning lessons that divert focus from the teacher and place focus on the students is a great way to give students more autonomy in their academic development. Students will not be coddled in the real world, why then should they be pampered in the classroom? Plan lessons that make students responsible for their own learning and they will benefit much more than from simply being fed facts, figures, and rules! **[SLIDE]**

Operational Activities – How can I do that?

Learner-centered instruction is not as simple as telling to students to 'get to it'. Learner-centered instruction takes much consideration and careful planning on the part of the instructor. Specifically, lessons that hope to take advantage of the benefits afforded by learner-centered instruction must be constructed with attention paid to all the factors that influence learning (the five elements discussed today, and many others available from the American Psychological Association's Center for Psychology in Schools and Education [<http://www.apa.org/ed/lcp2/lcp14.html>]). Other techniques that will positively affect learner-centered instruction include:

- Explicitly defining the learning goals
- Providing meaningful interactions, with special attention paid to social presence
- Using media and content that are appropriate to the needs of the learner and the learning process
- Using assessment and evaluation schemes that are compatible with lesson objectives
- Providing feedback to the learners and providing opportunities for the learners to provide feedback to the instructor
- Ensuring effective support is available so that students do not feel abandoned [**SLIDE**]

Review:

Learner-centered instruction focuses on the role of the learner, as opposed to the role of the instructor, in the learning process. Students can benefit from learner-centered instruction in that they are more active in the learning process; students themselves are responsible for their learning (as well as accountable for what they did not learn).

Learner-centered instruction teaches students the ever-so-important life lesson of responsibility. Teachers can employ learner-centered instruction in their classes by paying special attention to the factors that influence learning (as discussed today) and by providing clear and explicit goals to the students, allowing for meaningful interaction between students, and by using appropriate materials, content, evaluation schema, and feedback.

VII. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Today I have told you about four elements of the learning process that can be used in your English classes to facilitate authentic communication. I have devoted the majority of my time to the concept of social presence as I feel that this is not only the most

important element, but also the easiest to incorporate into your classroom and your lessons.

Throughout today's presentation, you have probably noticed how many times I used the words, 'community', 'facilitate (or facilitator)', and 'personalize'. The reason that I have used these words so often is that I strongly believe that these are areas which must be carefully considered in order to ensure effective teaching and effective learning.

[SLIDE]

I encourage you to build a community in your classroom. Do your utmost to make your students feel warm, welcome, and wanted. Do not forget to do the same for yourself. Open up to your students and they will do the same to you in return. The free exchange of thoughts and ideas is a fundamental part of learning and the English classroom in Korea should be no exception. **[SLIDE]**

Facilitate English learning in the classroom by acting as a guide rather than a boss. Be prepared to relinquish some of the control in the classroom and *together* with your students arrive at your destination – that destination being the attainment of lesson objectives. Give your

students chances to use what you have taught them. Give your students chances to use what they may have learned from outside sources. Give your students chances to make mistakes. Give your students chances to have a say in their academic development. While I am not advocating that students be given complete control over what happens in the classroom, I am suggesting that through careful planning and consideration that you do give students more opportunities to actively participate in the both the processes of learning *and* teaching. Students are capable of both! Let them try!

[SLIDE]

Finally, personalize the learning experience for your students. Find out what interests them and teach toward that. Evaluate your materials and references to make sure that they are congruent with what modern students expect and indeed *need* in order to learn. On a personal note, I've been in Korea since 1998. In that time, I have seen an astronomical amount of change in Korea. I am talking about physical changes (landscape, infrastructure, technology etc.) as well as mental changes (attitudes, outlooks, philosophies). I cannot even begin to imagine the amount of change that those of you who have

been in the teaching profession for so long must have been witness to!
I think that it is important for you to be aware of that change, and to use it in your teaching. I am speaking specifically of technological change. Use these changes in technology to personalize your lessons, your teaching styles, your classroom, and even yourself in order to better meet the needs of your students.

In closing, I am reminded of what one of my educational psychology professors told me when I was a student in university: **[SLIDE]**

REACH EACH YOU TEACH.

Today I hope that I have sent the same message to you and I also hope that I have provided you with some tools to help you do so.

Thank you very much!

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