



Shifting Responsibility from Teacher to Students

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The Concordia Language Villages (CLV) in Minnesota in the United States offers learners an immersion language learning experience in 14 languages: Arabic, Danish, English, Finnish, French, German, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Mandarin, Norwegian, Russian, Spanish, and Swedish. The CLV camps offer a total immersion experience. The target language is used not only during formal classes but also during mealtimes, club events, and free time activities. For the past two summers, I have had the opportunity to teach in the Japanese language camp of CLV.

As ideal as it sounds, working in this type of program presents challenges. For example, one student this summer was returning for his fifth year of Japanese camp. Another was in her first year. Although their Japanese language proficiency levels were similar, their social and learning needs were very different. How could I avoid complaints from the returnee student about repeating activities that he has done in previous years? How could I give the new student the support she needed without boring the returnee students? Another challenge related to classroom behavior. Although I try

to limit the amount of teacher-fronted instructional time in my classes, once in awhile I need to communicate something to the whole class. I noticed that some students did not listen even when I was discussing something very important. Like many teachers, I tried a number of solutions to address these and other problems. Several of my most successful solutions involved giving students greater responsibility for planning and leading class activities. In other words, instruction improved when I did less of it and gave students responsibility for more of it. Below are descriptions of several activities that show how my colleagues and I were able to do this.

Arubaito

The Japanese word *arubaito* meaning part-time job is derived from the German word for work, *arbeit*. During our 4-week camp, each student had two arubaito assignments. These chores included making announcements during mealtime, helping in the village bank or store, teaching classmates new songs, working as an assistant teacher with lower level students, and creating a board game. Arubaito tasks were designed and supervised by teachers.

Peer Teaching

Students in this program come from different language learning backgrounds and have worked with different textbooks and curricula. Thus, their knowledge of grammatical aspects of Japanese varies greatly. I wanted to help them review and/or learn a number of key grammatical structures. I assigned individual students a key sentence structure and example sentence to teach or review with their classmates. They did a marvelous job of thinking about how to present and practice their assigned structure. In another form of peer teaching, my students were assigned to teach a lesson on the gerund-like "*te*-form" to a student in a lower level class.

Planning Special Events

Every evening, there is a 75-minute activity, the focus of which is to help students learn about Japanese customs while having fun. These activities include puppet shows, talent shows, and simulations of traditional festivals and celebrations. In the past, teachers typically organized these events, but since many students were returnee campers this year, another teacher and I assigned our students to organize one of the evening programs. In groups of three or four, our students organized and presented various aspects of a summer *matsuri* (festival). They used Japanese throughout, and many commented that it was the best *matsuri* ever.

Assisting With New Student Orientation

There were both two- and four-week options in this language village. Thus, some students arrived two weeks after others. The continuing students helped with new student orientation. They took new students on a village tour and used skits to demonstrate the function of each area of the Japanese village. The skits showed new campers how to do such tasks as putting away dishes after eating, borrowing books from the library, and recycling beverage containers. The continuing students also did an excellent job of incorporating appropriate Japanese into their village tour. For example, they showed newcomers what they could and could not do using command forms that they had learned by listening to their teachers before.

Writing a Daily Newsletter

Last year, I composed a one-page daily newsletter about our class activities. However, I noticed that many students threw it away without reading it. This year, I assigned my students to write a daily one-page dialog journal entry that I responded to. It was a great way for me to learn what my students were thinking and to respond to their personal concerns or questions. Unfortunately, they did not have a chance to read or hear what their classmates wrote. I realized I could combine the time used for personal journal writing with the goal of providing students with something to read by asking one student each day to be responsible for the class newsletter. S/he wrote during the journal writing time. Students did not limit themselves to a report of camp activities but included personal stories, family history, and future dreams. Their personal stories helped their classmates get to know them better and brought our class closer together.

Writing Secret Partner Letters

Another teacher and I tried a variation on the dialog journal idea described above. Her students and mine were matched as secret pen pals. They exchanged several letters with each other over the course of several weeks. Then, we brought the classes together, and they found out who their partners were. Students enjoyed writing for someone other than a teacher, and they handled very well the responsibility of responding to their partners, saving the teachers a great deal of time. This activity was the most popular with students.

Conclusion

The activities described above outline ways in which a teacher can transfer to students some of the responsibility for planning and carrying out class activities. These activities were effective and well received because they gave students a chance to learn by doing and to learn from each other. They addressed several concerns that I had about class management and individual student needs. Finally, student comments demonstrated that they were also fun.

About the Author

Masaki Seo earned a B.A. in TESL from Hawai'i Pacific University and a B.A. in religion from the University of Hawai'i where he is currently a student in the Second Language Studies program. He is interested in group dynamics, materials development, and peer teaching.

