Thoughts on Text-Based Pedagogy as a Student-Teacher

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The foreign language education workshop included methodology and pedagogy concerning reading and writing among other things, but its main focus was on *text-based* pedagogy. At first, it was hard for me to imagine what a text was other than a text, as in written language in a textbook. Initially, I thought I would learn teaching methodology on reading or writing. However, I have gained a realization of the necessity of authentic texts in the class when we teach.

Before the workshop, the meaning of *text* was unclear. However, gradually the meaning became clear and most participants understood the meaning of *Text* which Dr. Mickan frequently mentioned. Giving us an opportunity to think about it, we were able to discuss it amongst ourselves gradually coming to an understanding. There were also opportunities to listen to other teachers' and students' ideas. For example, we discussed different types of texts, such as newspapers or e-mails.

The Genius English-Japanese Dictionary's definition of *text* is a follows: (1) a sentence, (2) original, (3) a phrase, (4) a textbook, (5) sentences of newspapers or magazine. Thus, I initially imagined *texts* as the written word as sentences in a textbook. The series of lectures gradually helped us notice *texts* are not only written language. Having time to share our ideas in the workshop, one participant mentioned conversations as an example of a text throwing everybody off. Even if it is not formal, visual, not written in the textbook, it is a *text*. In other words, newspapers, TV, books, e-mails, and conversations with somebody are all *texts*. Our everyday routines are filled with variations of *texts*. Thus, understanding what texts are, the next step is to understand that all *texts* have meaning.

In addition, when we took Dr. Mickan's German class, we felt that we can say not only the words he used, but also his expressions or gestures were texts. Although, we did not know any German, Dr. Mickan was talking only in German. Even if we did not understand at the beginning, we could guess what he is talking about because of his repetitions, gestures, and expressions. Moreover, we were in groups of three or four people, so we could ask our group members anytime if we had a question. For example, we were able to understand a recipe written strictly in German.

During the last session, the demonstration of a German class, our heads were full of questions, due to the many words we did not know. However, teachers must remember this is

the same feeling as students who have just entered our classes or just started learning English. I, too, hope not to forget this feeling when I start teaching in the future. As I have, many beginning students feel an enormous barrier towards English because they are learning something completely new. As long as teachers remember this, they can better support their students' learning by understanding their point of view. During the German class, it was extremely difficult at first, but as we were trying to find meaning in the text, and trying to help each other, we gradually understood this completely new language. The teacher must not force their students to study or memorize without giving them opportunity to think about or ask questions, in which case would result in no learning. Perhaps in a worst case scenario, this could encourage negative attitudes, such as hatred towards English and learning in general.

Thus, it is critical for teachers to use various kinds of authentic texts in the classroom, for instance, communication with others, textbooks, TV language, newspapers, gestures, and other authentic expressions, as mentioned above. Also, giving students time to think and help each other in their learning is essential. In addition, making mistakes are really important for learning with texts, these mistakes facilitate understanding. The classroom should become a place where students are allowed to make mistakes without anxiety, so that we can learn from them. Regardless, I understand creating this environment is not easy because teachers have to assess their students somehow, though I am still skeptical if being assessed by the test is the best way. Unfortunately, with our test-centered classroom it is difficult for students to gain the flexibility and the confidence to make those mistakes. Most students will not be able to study without worrying about mistakes, so we need to develop alternative methods of assessing students. This in turn will let us create those safe learning environments in which students can learn without worrying about assessment.

In the University of Tokushima's English Support Room, a self-access center, many people continue to come because they are motivated to learn from other people, authentic texts, including theirs and others' mistakes. Students do not have to worry about making mistakes in this room because nobody assesses, criticizes, or gives them a score. There are so many authentic texts in this room and from the people. For instance, in my experience, I could learn some phrases from a friend's conversation, because I was trying to extract its meaning, I could guess from the text around it which was deeply rooted in authentic communication. This resulted in long-term learning, and not forgetting after the test or class as my other learning experiences.

In university classes, group work could be a good method to work with authentic texts. For example, in the first class, most students do not know each other or the teacher. Thus, doing self-introductions to obtain unknown but relevant information about the teacher or other students from the authentic text, and learn by making meaning from it. Students should get an opportunity to get to know each other in small groups of 3 or 4 people first. This would create that safe and

relaxed classroom atmosphere and when they introduce themselves, they will not worry about mistakes, and they would try to gather information from their peers through usage of authentic texts.

As mentioned above, assessment would perhaps be a good topic for the workshop. This would also be a continuation of learning. If we only think of tests as assessment, as is the case with many teachers and students, students will still only be worried about the score and not study for themselves but for that test. The test deprives students of their chance to learn from their mistakes by making meaning from authentic texts. Making mistakes is learning. There is no teacher who wants students to study only for the test. Thus, we need to find good method of assessment to support their learning.

In sum, we need to use authentic *texts* in our learning to make it meaningful and long-term. Making meaning from authentic texts will encourage this, because we are learning naturally from them through our daily life. Through reading books, communicating with friends, cooperating with others, we are making meaning as a part of our daily life unconsciously. In other words, we are learning. The teachers also should use authentic texts for their students' learning in the class. However, if the texts used in class are inauthentic and only for the test and it is impossible or meaningless to make meaning from the language and only good for memorizing, students will not learn anything. Perhaps the only thing they will learn is a hatred for the subject. Therefore, teachers should keep this in mind, if they want students to learn anything, and keep improving.