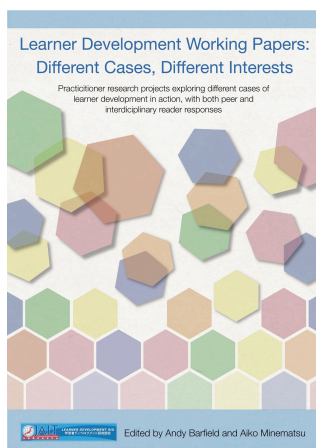


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## **Teaching everyone to fish was never going to be that simple: Challenges in incorporating learner development into a speaking curriculum**

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## Chapter Five

### Teaching everyone to fish was never going to be that simple: Challenges in incorporating learner development into a speaking curriculum

**Nathan Ducker, Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University, James Dean Brown, University of Hawai'i at Mānoa, and Mark Posselius, Ritsumeikan University**

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#### Abstract

This chapter focuses on developing the post-test feedback process in a speaking program at a Japanese university. The author, Nathan Ducker, describes how students across multiple sections in an English language program were resistant to using teacher feedback in their classroom speaking tests. In response to this problem, the author investigated how to help students respond proactively to teachers' comments and grades. After initially trying to investigate which strategies students needed to help practice their speaking, the author realised (with the help of the peer reader—J.D. Brown) that resolving a more fundamental issue about the way the testing process was designed would encourage all the students in the program to focus more on using teacher feedback. Adjustments to the speaking test program involved the use of voice recorders and Google Documents to share recordings of students' tests in order to carry out an out-of-class self-review, and an in-class peer review. A pilot study of two sections indicated that the approach works well, and with further help from the interdisciplinary reader—Mark Posselius—Nathan concludes that small incremental steps to the structure of the course can have a strong influence in helping students become better learners.

#### 要旨

本章では、日本の大学のスピーキングプログラムにおける試験後のフィードバックプロセスの発展手順について焦点をあてている。筆者である Nathan Ducker は、いかに英語プログラムの多くのクラスの学生が教室内のスピーキングテストで教師からのフィードバックを使用する事に抵抗を示すかについて述べている。この問題に应运、筆者は学生が教師からのコ

メントや成績に対してどうしたら前向きな反応を示すか調査をした。最初に学生のスピーキングの練習を援助する為に必要な策を調査しようとした後で、筆者は、(ピアリーダーである J. D. Brown 氏の助けの基) 設定された試験のプロセスについてもっと根本的な問題を解決する事で、プログラムの全学生が、教師からのフィードバックを使う事により集中するであろう、という事に気が付いた。スピーキングテストプログラムの調整には、クラス外での自己レビューやクラス内での相互評価を実行する為、学生の録音されたスピーキングテストがシェアできる様、ボイスレコーダーや Google ドキュメントの使用も含まれている。2つのクラスでの試験的な調査で、このアプローチがうまく作用している事が判明し、さらに学際的 (インターディシプリナリー) リーダーである Mark Posselius 氏の手助けにより、Nathan はコースの構造に対して少し付加的な措置をとる事で、学生がよりよい学習者になる為の強い影響を与えるという事を結論付けた。

## Key words

tests, feedback, peer-review, Google documents, speaking skills

キーワード: 試験、フィードバック、ピアレビュー、グーグルドキュメント、スピーキングスキル

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## Chapter Five

### Teaching everyone to fish was never going to be that simple: challenges in incorporating learner development into a speaking curriculum

Nathan Ducker, Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University, James Dean Brown, University of Hawai'i at Mānoa, and Mark Posselius, Ritsumeikan University

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## Part One

### Introduction

A favorite quote of mine that is often attributed to the historical Chinese figure Lao Tzu is: "Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day; teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime." I believe that this concept can be applied to schooling in many situations. If I were to spoon feed students grammar, vocabulary, functions of language etc... to pass a test, then my student will pass the test. However, they will be no better equipped to deal with any future tests, further educational challenges, or indeed, many of their language needs in their future careers and private lives. If I can help my students to develop a more effective approach to study, hopefully they will become better able to cope with future challenges, not only in their language education, but in many other areas too. For example, I believe a language learner who is able to self-motivate themselves when struggling with their learning progress, would also be able to self-motivate when facing a difficult challenge in their future career, rather than giving up. However, I find that helping students develop as learners is often hindered by many different factors including time, students' perception of what good teaching and learning is, students' motivation, and the importance of passing tests.

Teaching on a mandatory English course for Japanese undergraduates, I find many students

treat English (and education in general) as an obstacle to be overcome in their quest to gain credits to graduate, rather than as a passion, or an opportunity for self-development. Subsequently, a common feature of our courses is frequent testing in order to not only monitor progress but also to motivate students to actually study. As an example of this, the intermediate course around which this chapter is based has 8 speaking assessments, 8 listening quizzes, a mid-term listening and a final listening test, a mid-term grammar test, and a final writing test—all in a 15-week course. As a result, I and many of my colleagues find ourselves *teaching to the test*. While I agree in principle that tests do motivate students to study, I am also worried that this approach does not help students develop as learners or as people. This has led me to join a newly forming voluntary speaking curriculum development team. The speaking component of the curriculum has been designed with a specific focus on developing communication skills that students can use on the university's multilingual and multinational campus. The speaking curriculum team's initial focus has been to ask ourselves how we can develop the speaking program so that students not only gain useful skills for communication, but are also encouraged to become better language learners and thus escape the vicious cycle of teachers teaching only to the test and learners only learning for the test.

### **The speaking program's current situation and challenges in learner development**

The course described in this chapter covers a 15-week, four-credit, general English course at an international university in Japan (the university currently has 3,208 domestic, i.e., Japanese, students and 2,526 international students from 83 different countries). In the intermediate level of the speaking program, students are required to sit eight short, independent but interrelated, paired speaking tests delivered in a three-lesson cycle of: (a) presentation of test goals, (b) practice of test items, and (c) testing. Tests focus on a student's ability to master a set of language functions to complete a conversational task, with students graded on their completion of task components while simultaneously being assessed but not graded on their language proficiency. (Appendix 1 includes a copy of a test item and the matching grading rubric.) As most members of the speaking team are already very familiar with this course, we decided to use it as a starting point to work on improvements to the program.

When I initially joined the speaking curriculum team, we made the decision to take as critical a view as possible before trying to make any adjustments to the course materials and tests. After searching for several weeks for a model of evaluation of a speaking program and finding no suitable models, I reinterpreted four issues described as important by Bygate

(2011) in developing speaking assessments: "*the construct of speaking, the construct of task, the criteria of performance, and the construct of oral development*" (p. 412). We chose this tool of analysis as it is specific to speaking, and allowed us to examine the content of our speaking program deeply rather than the structure of the program, as well as look at what we were doing—instead of focusing on what we thought we should be doing. In brief, this reinterpretation gave the speaking curriculum team an analysis tool that we could use to describe the design of our speaking program to other teachers. The criteria we settled on were: (a) the model of speaking that students were being evaluated against, (b) the types of task that students were being tested on, (c) the particular criteria by which the quality of a learner's speaking performance were judged, and (d) the learning behaviors that students were undergoing as they improve and in order to improve. We then spent a month reviewing all the documents (teaching materials, syllabi, course outline documents, etc.) relating to the mandatory speaking program and produced an overview of the speaking program (see Appendix 2). This preliminary documentary review revealed that no attention was being paid to (d) learner behavior during the curriculum planning process.

In addition to a review of all of the documents pertaining to the program, we surveyed students and teachers in the intermediate stream. The survey revealed that the average student practiced three times for each speaking test outside of class, and that the average practice was 30—60 minutes long. Deeper investigation through interviews revealed the motivating effect that having tests had in encouraging students to do extra homework practice. These results led us to surmise that the tests were useful in motivating students to practice and that we should maintain a high number of tests in the mandatory program. However, the results of our investigation also revealed that students only employed a narrow range of strategies to help them pass these tests—such as writing a script, making a list of key points to cover, and rehearsals with a friend. Furthermore, we learnt that students pay no attention to teacher feedback. Additionally, teachers are aware that students do nothing with feedback, but worryingly they do not feel in a position to take action to remedy this situation. Later interviews with teachers revealed that for some, the time to remedy the situation was not available; for others they felt it was the student's responsibility to take action once feedback had been given; and for others the non-use of feedback was seen as related to a wider difference in perception between students' views of testing as having a summative value, and the teacher's intended formative purpose. For the speaking team, the non-use of feedback by students is a serious problem. Feedback provides students with a diagnosis of their speaking ability, and a prescription of areas that can be improved and ways to do so. If learners are not using this valuable information, it is an important barrier to more effective study. Not only do we need to know why students are not using our feedback, but we also need to work out how we can effectively give

students feedback so they are able to use this information to develop their speaking skills.

One idea that the speaking team has since been working on is to provide teachers with a modified feedback system in which a database of practice activities (learning tactics or strategies) is used so that teachers can recommend strategies to students, depending on which aspect of their oral proficiency teachers diagnose as requiring further improvement in the speaking tests. We hope this system will:

- enable teachers to give concrete advice with achievable objectives to students;
- motivate and better equip students to take action on teacher given post-test feedback;
- require curriculum planners to pay more attention to learners' actions when writing syllabi and curriculum requirements.

Before any of these suggested changes can be widely implemented, we need to understand what effects such a system will have. Furthermore, we need to be able to predict a large number of learner needs that we can respond to with useful learner centered activities / strategy advice. In the fall semester of 2012 / 2013 I have therefore been investigating student reactions to learning advice, in the form of strategies, with my classes before attempting to expand the system across all classes in the course. To do this, I have asked my students to keep a journal of all their speaking activities in class and outside of class. They have also been asked to write their reactions to each speaking test, in terms of (a) their affective response, (b) whether they understood my diagnosis and prescription for improvement, and (c) any subsequent actions they would take to improve their speaking ability. In addition to understanding the students' perspectives and reactions to the speaking tests, I hoped that the act of reviewing the test and answering some reflective questions about their practice and performance would help guide students to take a more pro-active stance towards using their teacher feedback and developing further practice habits.

### **Gaining insights from students' learning journals**

The students were under no particular instructions to write in either Japanese or English, but as the language program has a strict "English only" policy, it seemed likely that the students would write in English. While this may be a useful practice, I believed it would also limit students' ability to deeply review their speaking performance. A further limit to the learner journals was that, as my class is one of 18 classes at the intermediate level, this means that we need to study the same materials as the other classes and so there is little space in the course to introduce new materials, or new approaches. There is moreover, no

flexibility in the grading structure of the course—teachers need to deliver the standard tests on the allotted day in order to fulfill course requirements. Therefore the journals were an extra-addition to regular student classwork rather than an integral part of developing an autonomous approach in the speaking program. Despite having some immediate positive effects, keeping a journal had several important limitations that I decided I would have to deal with in trying to find out the answers to the following questions:

1. What forms of strategy advice are commonly needed by learners? This requires me to be able to diagnose an area for improvement, discern if there is a specific cause for a weak area, and then prescribe an action to help improve this area. For example, a student may need to work on fluency. This may be caused by the student struggling to recall appropriate vocabulary. Activities to develop deeper vocabulary knowledge and improve recall would therefore be needed.
2. A follow-up question must then be: can activities and advice be generalizable? That is, can the development of one kind of strategy used for one learner then be effectively taken up by another learner?
3. Are some strategies that we recommend to students more accessible than other strategies? For example, some students may be less inclined to practice something like shadowing and recording themselves for later review when they may find listening to their own voice embarrassing. Sub-questions that I would also need to ask are: What forms of strategy advice do students most/least understand? And are some strategies more or less difficult for students to practice?
4. What medium of advice is most accessible to students? For example, is it best to write down the advice to students? Or should we include the advice in their online grade book (we use 'Blackboard') to keep students informed of their grades? Or indeed should we be giving the students pre-prepared worksheets to direct them in their improvement activities?

As can be seen, the introduction of strategy training into a mandatory and standardized course poses many challenges. As I am already aware of the fact that a high number of tests motivates students to study to pass the tests, I also feel the need to question the underlying ideology of the course: Is encouraging students to take a more strategic approach to learning compatible with the underlying program structure and approach? Does the inclusion of self-directed practice go against the idea that a student needs to be motivated by grades to study? Will students have enough time to pursue further practice with varying strategies? Furthermore, in a standardized course, how can such an apparently individualized approach fit with standardized materials?



In the second part of this chapter, I will use two data sources—(a) a record of my diagnosis and prescriptive advice to students, and (b) students' journals of their speaking practices—to explore and re-interpret the problematic aspect of developing students' strategy use in a curriculum in which multiple teachers deliver homogenous content, and in which the speaking program is already considered effective in encouraging students to do further study.

### **Peer reader response from James Dean Brown, University of Hawai'i at Mānoa**

*All in all, I find your project interesting and innovative, Nathan. However, in the spirit of these responses, I will raise three sets of issues in the hope that they will prove thought provoking and useful, and will serve to promote further development of your project.*

*First, in describing your current intermediate course at the start of this chapter (complete with its 20 quizzes and tests in 15 weeks), you worry that "... I and many of my colleagues find ourselves teaching to the test." As teachers, we tend to use the phrase teaching to the test as though it is understood by all to be a bad thing. And in cases where we find ourselves teaching to some large-scale and general standardized test (i.e., norm-referenced<sup>1</sup>) like the TOEFL, IELTS, or some high school or university entrance examinations, I agree that teaching to the test can be a colossal waste of time, effort, and resources. However, when we develop classroom assessment (i.e., criterion-referenced) specifically dedicated to assessing the very outcomes we want our students to learn, I see no problem at all with teaching to the test—if that test is a good one. In fact, the goal of your project does not appear to be the elimination of teaching to the test so much as striving to align the assessment with a clear conceptualization of the "model of speaking" you will assess, the "types of tasks" involved, the "particular criteria" for judging student performances, and "learning behaviors" students will need to improve. So my question is this: aren't you really advocating teaching to the test as well, but teaching to a thoughtfully conceptualized test (based on the course goals with input from all stakeholders)?*

*Second, your conclusion that your learners are not using the valuable feedback provided by the teachers is an important and somewhat disconcerting observation. Clearly, this issue is central to your project, and you tackle it head on in addressing your fourth research question. I'm wondering if one additional idea might help clarify your thinking about this issue: would it be possible for you to build use of feedback right into the assessment process in some sort of continuous assessment<sup>2</sup> scheme that would require students to notice, attend to, respond to, manipulate, or apply the feedback that they receive. That way the students would have no choice but to use the feedback.*

*Third, it occurs to me that there is a fifth cluster of research questions that might be useful for this project: What learning strategies did your students learn and use in the past? And, to what degree is it possible for your students to change their habitual learning strategies at this late stage of their educational development, that is, do your students feel that they can modify the ingrained ways they have always learned and studied? And, to what degree do they feel that their learning strategies are culturally imbedded? For instance, to what degree have your Japanese students inculcated their learning strategies from their past yakudoku or other learning (and their previous teachers)? And more importantly in your context, how do your students feel that learning strategies vary among students within Japanese culture, and then between the many other students' cultures at your university? And, to what degree do their views change from before strategy instruction to after strategy instruction?*

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## Part Two

Two important things struck me about the comments that J. D. Brown (JD) made concerning our testing approach. The first was that we should really be embracing the tests as a way to help students learn better. As such, several of the questions that JD focused on are really important here: Are we really testing the right things (i.e., What is the model of language? Are we using the right criteria to judge?)? Are we using the right tests and testing process to elicit the desired language and language improvement activities?

With all these things, my ability to make changes to what I do as a teacher and what I expect my students to do is constrained by various institutional concerns. For example, in order to maintain course integrity, I cannot change the tests that students in my class take, without changing all the tests for all the other classes in that level. I would also have to get permission to do so from the coordinators and directors of the English language program, and I would have to check if making these changes had any effects on program continuity—i.e., is the work repeated elsewhere in the program, or does later work in the program rely on students completing work in my level?

A final concern I have developed since I received JD's comments concerns the data that I was able to collect from my students. Firstly, as I had previously commented, students' motivation to carry out work unrelated to their grade was quite limited, so students'

speaking journals revealed that they had little motivation to work after a test had been completed—as I already knew. I was also able to confirm that many students used the same tactics or strategies again and again to focus on test completion. Our tests and testing process were “frontloaded”. In order to find the right kind of balance between test preparation and test review, I decided to focus on two of JD's points as I continued my inquiry. The first was to consider the idea that several important autonomous learning skills are required for students to use their test evaluations to spur their improvement—in short, could I transform the testing process to have students *notice, attend to, respond to, manipulate, or apply the feedback*? This is a process of formative assessment—using assessment to direct learning activities and drive improvements. Secondly, as JD points out, this is likely to be easier to achieve in a process of continuous assessment—integrating assessment and related work into the everyday cycle of teaching, and requiring students to participate in the whole cycle rather than just the pre-test part of the cycle.

### **Moving to formative assessment**

In response to these ideas, I have started this semester (Spring 2013 / 2014) to approach my testing process (post-assessment) differently. Previously, upon student completion of the paired classroom oral test, I would focus on task completion and tell the students on the spot my general impressions of their performance. I would then give each student some advice on one area of oral proficiency that I felt they should focus on improving before advising them about an activity they could try out to help improve this area. I would then evaluate the next pair of students. After evaluating all the students, I would then complete review sheets and return them to students the next class with my evaluation of their task completion, together with a grade, strong areas of oral proficiency, and areas for improvement together with a suggested activity to work on to make that improvement.

Taking onboard advice from JD, and referring to a meta-study of formative assessments by Black and Wiliam (1998), in the 2013 spring semester I discussed my approach to feedback with my colleagues in the speaking team and implemented a different approach that puts students' self-review at the center of the post-test activities. If the approach proved practical in my class, then we would implement a wider study across multiple sections of the course, before adopting this approach course-wide, and, later, potentially program-wide.

The new approach uses a Google file-sharing and storage system so that each student can keep an electronic portfolio of their speaking assignments. During the oral test, I make a recording of the students' performance and take notes. Once students complete the paired oral test, I make some general comments on positive areas from the test concerning both

the task completion and the students' oral proficiency. Students then leave, and I test the next pair. Upon completion of the tests for all students, I upload the students' oral tests audio recordings in MP3 format to my Google documents drive and then share the files with the class (any students who do not wish to have their test made public are allowed an opt out—and I then send the MP3 file to them directly by email). Once students have received copies of the audio files, they are required to transcribe their speaking test performance into a document (which is private between teacher and student) and then identify the phrases they used to complete the task requirements. Following this, students are required to identify one area of oral proficiency they think is their strongest and say why. They are then asked what their weakest area of oral proficiency is. Following this, students are invited to listen to other students' audio files and write which of these they found impressive and why. Finally, students complete an oral proficiency improvement plan. This features the area they wish to improve, potential improvement activities, a timetable for practice, and how they will monitor the success of their subsequent practices.

The final part of this assessment process is carried out in class. Firstly, once the deadline for review has passed, I hand my evaluation of students' performances back in class—while withholding students' actual grade (according to the Black and Wiliam meta-study, numerical grades can have a demotivating influence on students). Students are then required to norm their review with my review, discussing with me and their partner any areas where there are discrepancies between my evaluation and the student's self-evaluation and trying to pinpoint why this discrepancy has occurred. They also discuss with their partner what they should have said, and where they can improve their oral proficiency. In order to give students an opportunity to use the feedback information available to them (teacher's comments, their own review, and their partner's advice) to improve their language performance, students re-record a "perfect" version of their conversation with a friend and share it with their classmates and me through Google documents.

### **Student feedback on the new process**

There are two key issues surrounding the new testing and feedback procedures that I needed to address before feeling comfortable that the processes that I am now following are "good practice": firstly, obviously, I need to know if the feedback system I have put in place does indeed allow students *to notice, attend to, respond to, manipulate, or apply the feedback* that they are receiving. Similarly, I need to know whether students notice and value the learning and development opportunities that this process offers. Additionally, I was worried that the process involves quite a lot of extra work for the students; transcribing a speaking test can take extra time, so did this create undue strain on the students to

complete the work? Finally there is the question of opportunity cost—could students have used this time on further speaking activities or other language learning opportunities? In order to answer these questions, I was able to compare data collected at the end of the current semester with data collected from my classes in the spring semester the previous year, and I could also call upon my classroom observations as well.

Firstly, I wanted to know if the feedback process was effective in helping students notice and attend to language improvement opportunities. I therefore asked the following questions and have included the corresponding positive response ratings (yes) in brackets (all score are out of a total of 37 students):

*While transcribing my test, I can notice the following:*

- *if my test was completed properly (31)*
- *if I made a grammar mistake (33)*
- *a vocabulary mistake (34)*
- *if my pronunciation was poor (32)*
- *if my fluency was poor (37)*
- *if I misheard my partner (30)*
- *if I made a conversational (pragmatic) mistake (28).*

I then wanted to know if students could help their classmates while reviewing another person's speaking test in-class, so I asked the same points again concerning a student's review partner's audio files and transcript. The responses are as follows:

*While listening to my partner's test in-class, I can notice the following:*

- *if his / her test was completed properly(29)*
- *if she / he made a grammar mistake (30)*
- *if she / he made a vocabulary mistake (29)*
- *if his / her pronunciation was poor (27)*
- *if his / her fluency was poor (29)*
- *if she / he did not answer his / her partner properly (no distinction between listening comprehension or pragmatic problem) (27).*

The student responses satisfied me that the changed process had created a valuable opportunity for the majority of the students to notice opportunities for themselves and their partners to improve.

The next thing I wanted to know was if students felt that they were able to act on any of

these affordances for improvement. I asked the questions:

*During the speaking review I have been able to give my partner useful advice on:*

- *completing the test properly (24)*
- *body language and voice volume (20)*
- *fluency (18)*
- *grammatical accuracy (20)*
- *pronunciation (23)*
- *vocabulary (24)*
- *conversation skills (17).*

I also asked the reverse question to students:

*During the speaking review other students have been able to give me useful advice on:*

- *completing the test properly (25)*
- *body language and voice volume (25)*
- *fluency (24)*
- *grammatical accuracy (25)*
- *pronunciation (25)*
- *vocabulary (27)*
- *conversation skills (26).*

Again, following the answers that students gave, I felt that it was a useful activity to have students discuss improvements with each other in order to improve their performance as over half of the students deemed that they had given useful advice to their partners and reciprocally received useful advice from their partner.

Next, concerning the efficacy of the speaking tests as a whole, I was concerned as to whether the new feedback process had positively impacted students' language ability or whether in some way it had detracted from their overall learning process. In order to find this out, I compared data from my previous spring semester class and this semester's classes. Assuming that the feedback adjustments had not had a negative effect on students' learning, then students should have similar or better impressions of their improvements then students in the previous matriculation. Table 1 below shows students' impressions from the previous semester (pre-change) and this one (post-change). For the purposes of comparison results are represented as percentages rounded to one decimal point

**Table 1 Comparison of students' impression pre- and post-change**

I improved my ...	2012 Spring (pre-study) <i>n</i> = 42	2013 Spring (adjusted feedback process) <i>n</i> = 37
○ ability to choose correct vocabulary	65%	75.6%
○ conversational skills	45.2%	73%
○ grammatical accuracy	65%	73%
○ ability to talk on a range of topics	45%	70.3%
○ confidence	54.8%	70.3%
○ willingness to communicate with international students on campus	47.6%	67.6%
○ complexity of expression	50%	64.9%
○ pronunciation	47.6%	62.1%
○ fluency	50%	56.7%

Without drawing too many direct comparisons between the groups (as this was not a controlled experiment and did not have large numbers), I was satisfied that the new feedback process had had a positive impact on students' perceptions of their learning in comparison to the previous year. I also felt that the re-recording of students tests showed improvements in both task completion and in overall speaking proficiency.

The final question I had was to do with time, as I wanted to make sure that by spending more time on review students were not losing time in other areas or under too much stress with extra work. My first point of comparison was to judge if students were able to complete the review work in time for class. They were able to do this consistently. Only on two occasions during the semester did a student fail to complete work in time for a class. Secondly, I wanted to check if students engaged in the new feedback process were not, consequently, spending less time on test preparation. In the 2012 spring semester 63% of the students told me that they did three or more 30 minutes + practices per test. On the speaking team, we roughly calculated that this was equivalent to:

3 x 45 minutes practices per test = (135 minutes)

or an extra 18 hours of study per semester (135 minutes x 8 tests)

or 12 extra classes of study

or 3 weeks of extra study per semester.

After the new feedback process was introduced, my students reported similar study behaviors in preparation for the speaking tests. Finally, I wanted to check how long students spent reviewing. The average response from my students (mode) was between 30 minutes and one hour. While I was extremely surprised at this response as I envisaged that transcribing and reviewing test performance would take much longer, the data made me feel that the process is not overly time consuming.

Given these findings, I feel confident that the new feedback process can be introduced to multiple classes with different teachers in the intermediate level of the English program. I also believe that the new process will be successful in encouraging students to pay attention to and use test feedback for developing and applying their own learning strategies in a far more productive fashion than they had previously done. While the changes I have described focus on the immediate course that students are studying on, my interest in this project originally comes from my belief that university learning will help students become better equipped to become successful lifelong learners. During my time at this university I have become friends with the head karate teacher Mark Posselius, and in discussing teaching with him, I noticed that he had some interesting views on how learning karate as a discipline can help in various future paths - similar to my own beliefs about developing skills in one area can be applied in others. Mark also focuses much on self-awareness in karate and developing mental process to help focus learning efforts, much in the same way that I see strategy use in language learning. I therefore asked him for his perspective on my work in developing the feedback process that I have just described.

### **Interdisciplinary reader response from Mark Posselius, Ritsumeikan University**

*After viewing the paper that you had handed me and reviewing it again, I have a feeling that what you had said is quite correct, Nathan. The feeling that the students only study for the tests and only concern themselves about getting a grade that will let them pass seems to be the norm. Only the well-, and/or, self-motivated student will strive to better what they can do. And it seems that those are the students who have a clearer goal as to what they want to do. There are, in my opinion, two paths here. One, the teacher sets up a goal for the student or the student sets up a goal for them-selves.*

*As a Karate teacher, I find feedback to the students as one of my best instruction tools. The problem is what, they the students, do with that feedback. In my case, after a test, I review*



*each move they did and I make them write down the comments into a notebook that they have, which is only for Karate and then go and practice it for several lessons afterward. This seems to help them remember and it gives them time to practice it without any pressure. Then I watch and comment on what they can improve on and have them practice it again.*

*I find that if I give them a task that seems simple, they are more likely to try and solve it. Review or practice of everything is a must in Karate. I tell my students, "Your practice becomes your learning."*

*I welcome their questions. By listening to their questions, I know how they are looking at things. I never try to give them the answers outright especially if I have taught them that answer before. I try to formulate my questions so that they need to go back and look at the beginning in order to understand the end (i.e., find the answer that they were looking for). \**  
*Note: I always tell my students that "all the answers are out there, you just need to ask the right question", as well as, "the answer is only as important as the question."*

*I find that students understand small increments better than long ones. Break up the grading points into smaller increments and make your feedback a task for them to review and test them on that review. Make that more points than a regular test, then, they would really need to use and understand and show that they reviewed that feedback. As the teacher, then you'd know that they had studied and done a serious review.*

*In Karate, it is all about thinking, and reviewing. Even the most mundane motions need to be reviewed over and over again. Then they get better. So, these were some further ideas that came to mind as I thought about how you might develop the feedback process in different ways:*

- 1. Give the students take-home conversations to be recorded or written down or even both to see if their writing is so much different than their conversation*
- 2. Why not try to have the better students help the slower students. Maybe they can relate to another student better than to the teacher. As the sole teacher of the Karate club this is an easy task to do as I have trained them. This is all done in class in the pairing of the students. Senpai with the Kohai or in an English class the better students with the other students. For the grading, it will all come out in the final review with the teacher's feedback to the student's that they will review and be graded on their review work as I mentioned before*
- 3. Before my students become a member of the club, they must write a joining paper. In that*

*joining paper they must say why they want to be a member of this club and what their goal is. So they must look at themselves and ask what they want to accomplish. Similarly, you might have the students develop some kind of learning contract about how they want to improve their speaking performance in relation to their future goals. Ask them how they see themselves using English in their future. Then you'd at least know what kind of motivation you are facing. A bit of self-reflection is a pretty good teacher, I find.*

*4. Pair the students and give them a take-home project that they must complete: a conversation of sorts. I find if I can show my Karate students that they can use what they learned and it works, they seem to want to study more.*

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## Part Three

### Concluding thoughts

Looking back at this project, I see a profound change in my way of approaching the idea of having students properly use their feedback from speaking tests. Originally, I was hoping to provide students with useful activities that students could be directed to—however there would be no guarantee that student would use those materials, and just as importantly by providing students with sets of activities, perhaps I would still be “spoon feeding” students rather than helping them develop as learners.

The feedback I received from JD and Mark helped me realize that instead of focusing on end products (practice strategies) that students can use, I need to be working on putting in place the correct structures and environment to encourage students to think about and develop their own strategies for practicing.

Firstly as JD pointed, I need to make sure that the test that we are using are useful and are perceived as useful for students by all the stakeholders in the university. If students consider the tests as useful, they will practice. The second part of this equation is that students must then see review and use of feedback as useful or they won't practice after the test. As JD and Mark both pointed out, there needs to be a shift in the way the tests are delivered so that students are then required to use feedback in some way. So the question is *what* to test and *how* to test.

Mark's comments about how he teaches karate have given me some clear ideas about practical things to what to try with students and they match with much of the theory on formative assessment.

Firstly, Mark talks about goal setting, and it is a strong theme in formative assessment that teachers and students must be clear on the goals that students are expected to achieve at the outset of any assessment. Furthermore, Mark talks about small incremental improvements, and it is again the purpose of any culture of formative assessment to guide students step by step through small improvements that contribute towards a final goal at the end of the course. Mark also mentions that he requires his students to show that they are using his feedback and that I could give the use of feedback higher grades than the actual test—this again reflects the literature on formative assessment that indicates that teachers need to provide students with opportunities to use their feedback, and that students must understand clearly that they are getting feedback and are expected to use it. Finally Mark indicates that he expects there to be an element of peer teaching and peer review in his classes, and again this is an important point of formative assessment that peer review should not only be used to help students improve on test performance but also to allow students to check and confirm that they understand the fulfillment criteria of the test.

Perhaps the most difficult things about all of this is the idea of peer-feedback and peer-review. With students coming into the course with many differing levels, I have always found it difficult to carry out peer review—until I noticed while using Google docs that often we don't structure peer review carefully enough and perhaps have students focus on the wrong areas of their performance and development. During the peer review many of my students would minutely focus on grammar or vocabulary points that were visible in the transcripts but by doing so, didn't focus on the particular speaking skills we were trying to develop—the *feedback they were giving was on the wrong thing and was thus not beneficial to improving their partner's speaking ability and concurrently their scores.*

To counter this, halfway through the Fall semester of 2013-2014 I dropped the requirement to transcribe the whole of the speaking test (unless a student wanted a thorough vocabulary and grammar review from me) and made students fill in a more focused peer review sheet after listening to the audio files in class. I also had to review the contents of the peer review and noticed that for many of the peer review items such as pronunciation, no direct instruction was given during the course and so students were not really qualified to pass judgment on their peers in this regard. Therefore, the peer review sheets also needed to be streamlined. These changes have subsequently led to a much quicker and more fun peer

review process.

A comparison of the survey responses from the previous semesters (spring 2012 and 2013) and judging by students' positive reactions to the new peer review process, I have now learned (with JD's and Mark's help) that by overtime making small incremental changes to the existing curriculum, we can really help students become more involved in their learning process and get better learning results.

## Notes

1. For more on the distinction between *standardized* (norm-referenced) and *classroom* (criterion-referenced) assessment, see Brown (2012).
2. *Continuous assessment* "...thoroughly integrates assessment into the curriculum, assessing and giving feedback to the students in constant, cyclical, and cumulative ways (including daily classwork, ongoing project work, portfolios, etc.), all of which is taken into consideration in grading or otherwise evaluating the students. This form of assessment is often contrasted with final examination systems." (Brown, 2013, p. 4); also see examples of continuous assessment (pp. 55-62). And, for a fuller treatment, see Cross and O'Loughlin (2011).

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## Appendix 1

### Speaking assessment task description

#### TEST ITEM 5: Conversation - Finding an Apartment to Rent.

##### Description of the Task:

This conversation is started by Student B

##### Student B -

You are living in the perfect situation. Your apartment/house is like a dream for you. However, you cannot stay in your apartment/house if you don't get a roommate.

During the speaking assessment you should:

- 1) Give a brief introduction to your apartment. Include information that will persuade the listener to move in. Be general, but be ready to provide supporting details during the question and answer section.
- 2) Answers questions that your partner asks.

##### Student A -

You are looking for an apartment/house to live in so you are asking your partner about his or her situation to see if it is a good place to live.

During the speaking assessment you should:

1. Introduce the topic of questions before asking them (use a variety of styles).
2. Ask questions to get information.
3. Record accurate information about the apartment, such as, rent, location, and so on.
4. Ask clarification questions to make sure the recorded information is accurate. Examples: *Did you say fourteen (14), or forty (40)? I'm sorry, how much did you say the rent was?*
5. Make a decision: Do you want to move into Student A's apartment or house?

##### Task Checklist

(20) Introduce (generally) the apartment

(20) Answer partner's questions

(20) Ask questions using transitions to signal topics

*I have a question about \_\_\_\_\_, I want to know more about \_\_\_\_\_, I want to ask about \_\_\_\_\_, Regarding \_\_\_\_\_, Concerning \_\_\_\_\_, Can you tell me about \_\_\_\_\_, I have one more question about \_\_\_\_\_*

(20) Maintain the conversation (show understanding)

*I see, I've got it, I understand, Right, OK*

(20) Close the conversation (Express appreciation and make a decision)

*"Thank you for answering all of my questions. I think I would like to live in your apartment/house because..." Or, "I don't think I could live in your apartment/house because..."*

## Speaking assessment task grading rubric

<b>Name:</b>		<b>Class:</b>		<b>Date:</b>	
<b>Completion of the task: Satisfies the requirements of the test item</b>					
(B) Introduce the apartment(20)	<input type="checkbox"/>				
(B) Answer questions (20)	<input type="checkbox"/>				
(A) Ask questions using transitions (20)	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Maintain conversation / show understanding (20)	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Close the conversation and make a decision (20)	<input type="checkbox"/>				
<b>Score</b>	0-49	50-59	60-69	70-79	80-89 90-100
<b>Hesitations and Halts in Speech, Mispronunciations and Enunciation, Connected Speech</b>					
		<== weaker ===== Stronger ==>			
hesitations, halts					
mispronunciations, enunciation					
connected speech					
<b>Word Order and Agreement, Grammar and Tense, Ability to Comprehend and Negotiate the Dialogue.</b>					
		<== weaker ===== Stronger ==>			
Syntax (word order and agreement)					
Accuracy (grammar and verb tense)					
<b>Body Language, Eye Contact, Voice Projection, Ability to Introduce and Maintain Conversation, Overcome Communication Breakdown</b>					
		<== weaker ===== Stronger ==>			
body language, eye contact, voice projection					
introducing new topics					
maintaining the conversation					
Overcoming communication breakdown					
<b>Range and use of vocabulary is content appropriate, English only (i.e., no unnecessary use of first language)</b>					
		<== weaker ===== Stronger ==>			
vocabulary range					

## Appendix 2 Overview of the speaking program

Level	Assessed Activities / Task (indicates genre)	Functional language	Competencies/skills	Academic skills / self-study skills
ELE B	1. Student / Teacher Role play 2. Conversation on a topic 3. Buying a service Role play 4. Presentation	Greetings / introduction / excuses / appointments / reasons (1, 3) asking conversational questions / showing interest (2) requests / asking for information (3) indicating (4)	register (1,3) accurate grammar (1, 2,3) smooth speaking (1,2,3) voice volume (1,2,3) accurate vocabulary selection (1) eye contact (2,3)	autonomy (go to SALC)
PIE A	1. Pair interview 2. Voice Recording 3. Role play 4. Presentation	giving opinions (1)(3) supporting opinions(1)(3) asking for information(3) agreeing/disagreeing(3) complaining(3) refusing(3) seeking/offering advice(3) giving reasons(3) finding solutions(3)	accurate grammar (tenses)(1) pronunciation(2)(4) intonation(2)(4) fluency(1)(2)(3)(4) register(3) level-appropriate grammar (4)	peer review (3)
IE A	Pair conversations: 1. Hometown 2. Planning weekend activities 3. Recipes 4. Day out in beppu 5. Find an apartment 6. Choosing a roommate 7. Health advice Group: 8. Product presentation	initiating conversations introducing topics giving opinions supporting opinions asking for information asking for clarification showing interest introducing follow-up questions	hesitations, halts mispronunciations, enunciation connected speech accurate syntax, grammar, vocabulary body language, eye contact, voice projection discourse management	peer review (8)
UIE A	Discussion 3 participants Presentation Discussion 3 Participants Presentation	giving opinions(1)(3) supporting opinions(1)(3) giving examples(1)(2)(3)(4)	level-appropriate grammar(1)(3) intonation(1)(3) fluency(1)(2)(3)(4) using transitions(2)(4)	