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PRIMARY ADVICE / Using video as a teaching aid

Helene J. Uchida / Special to The Daily Yomiuri

Q: I wonder how my students see me in class. I am thinking of videotaping myself but wonder if it would make them feel uncomfortable. Have you ever videotaped yourself teaching? Do you have any suggestions?

K.M.

Teacher

Saitama

A: Videotaping yourself teaching is an excellent idea. You can set up a video camera on a tripod or ask someone to shoot for you. It is important that the entire class can be viewed because you want to see not only yourself, but also how the students react to you and interact with each other. Please tell the children that you are videotaping the class to see how you teach, not how they act. This will take pressure off them and allow them to relax during the lesson.

My "Little America" classes have been videotaped for my TEMI (Teaching English Methods Institute) training program, and my pilot program for a local public school has been televised several times on various

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Emi Suzuki
Researcher, Organization for Islamic Area Studies, Waseda University

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news programs. Viewing myself has been quite edifying. I noticed some good points, like my maintaining a quick tempo and encouraging the children to be interactive. On the other hand, I noticed some negative points of which I had not been aware, namely that I come across as rather strict and that I frown more than I smile. Had I not seen myself through on video, I would not have been aware of how severe I come across. Watching the videos was a real eye-opener for me.

Recording your teaching in order to objectively see what you are doing right and where there is room for improvement is a commendable strategy. I hope that your question will inspire other teachers reading this column to follow your example.

Q:I am teaching adults who tend to translate English into Japanese. When you teach adults English, how do you cope with this?

Y.S.

Teacher

Fukuoka Prefecture

A:This summer, my husband and I visited my best friend in Copenhagen. While there, I was especially impressed with the English fluency of Danes. To our delight, everyone we met could speak English: bank clerks, salespeople, grocers, teachers, bus drivers, strangers on the street and, most remarkable of all, every child over the age of 11. When I asked my friend why, she explained: "Denmark is the size of Kyushu. We know that no one else is going to bother to learn Danish, so it is our responsibility to learn English so we can communicate with non-Danes."

Danish children start studying English (in English, not Danish) in the 3rd grade of primary school. I asked my friend for the other reasons Danes attain such fluency. This is what she told me:

- Foreign films are subtitled, not dubbed. English films are in English.
- American and British TV shows are never dubbed; everything is in English with subtitles.
- Danes of all ages are avid readers of English magazines and newspapers.

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- American/English music is popular with the Danes.
- Computer games are in English.
- Students are accustomed to seeing their parents interact in English, so it is natural for them.
- Danes use English when they travel to neighboring countries for business and pleasure.
- English is a high priority at both primary and secondary schools.
- Teachers do not translate in class, so students are accustomed to sticking to English from a young age.
- Even special education classes (for children with learning disabilities) have English lessons in English.
- Professionals in high level fields, like medicine, law, politics, education, engineering, etc., get most of their education and new information in English.
- University students are encouraged to study in an English-speaking country for at least one semester.
- Upon graduation from university, many students work and live abroad for one year.

Regrettably this is not the case in Japan because students are taught to translate in secondary school, which means that they think in Japanese when they approach English. Your adult students are products of such a system. It is too late to change them, but since they are eager, there are several things you can do with them to wean them from translation.

Warm-ups, keeping diaries written in simple English, introducing one vocabulary word per lesson and asking students to make a simple sentence using it, asking students to report their news of the week after which their classmates ask questions or make comments are a few activities you can coordinate in simple, easy-to-understand English. The key point is to orchestrate activities using simple English so they will not lean on Japanese.

Unlike the Danes, your students have been denied English nourishment from their society. If and when Japan adopts some of the strategies used in Denmark, the dependency upon translation will decrease.



* * *

Readers are encouraged to send questions on any themes related to teaching English to younger learners-- particularly those at the primary school level--to Helene J. Uchida via e-mail at dy-edu@yomiuri.com or fax (03) 3217-8247. Questions preferably should be written in English and should be accompanied by your name, occupation and the area you live in.

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Uchida is the director of Little America, a Fukuoka-based company for training teachers of English.

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