

Evaluating the Effectiveness of an English Conversation “Confidence Building” Orientated Class When Taught in a Japanese Junior College

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In our educational methods of today, we are attaching great importance to giving voluminous books and the information contained in these voluminous books to the students. We are not making enough of an effort to improve the ideas and ideologies of the students. The first thing a student needs is self-confidence, after which alone they will get self-satisfaction. Once they have acquired self-satisfaction, then the student should try their best to acquire the virtue of self-sacrifice and after self-sacrifice alone the student will reach self-realization. Thus to achieve self-realization, self-confidence is considered to be the most important thing.

The purpose of this research paper is to form a more evolved understanding of the importance and actual effectiveness of confidence building themed lessons when taught specifically to Japanese junior college students.

Keywords : self-confidence, self-esteem, adolescence, peer pressure

Introduction

People involved in language teaching often say that students who really want to learn will succeed whatever the circumstances in which they study.

Almost all teachers can think of situations in which certain “confident” students seem to do significantly better than their peers; students frequently succeed in what appear to be unfavorable conditions; they succeed despite using methods which some experts consider unsatisfactory. In the face of such phenomena it seems reasonable to suggest that the amount of initial confidence that students bring to class is the biggest single factor affecting their success.

“Self-confidence” *“behaving calmly because you have no doubts about your ability or knowledge and “motivation” enthusiasm for something”* (Cambridge Advanced Learners Dictionary, 2009) especially is some kind of internal drive that encourages somebody to pursue a course of action.

If we perceive a goal (that is, something we wish to achieve) and if that goal is sufficiently attractive, we will be strongly motivated to do whatever is necessary to reach that goal.

“Language learners who are confident and motivated perceive goals of various kinds. We can make a useful distinction between short-term goals and long-term goals. Long-term goals might have something to do with a wish to get a better job at some future date, or a desire to be able to communicate with members of a target language community. Short-term goals might include such things as wanting to pass an end of semester test or wanting to finish a unit in a book”

(Hoadley, 1977, p. 29)

In general I think most teachers would agree that self-confident students with long-term goals are probably considered easier to teach than those who have no such goals (and therefore no real confidence or drive).

What kind of self-confidence do students have? Is it always the same?

There are two main categories to consider: *extrinsic* confidence, which is more concerned with factors *outside* the classroom, and *intrinsic* confidence, which is concerned with what actually takes place *inside* the classroom.

“Many different factors can have an impact upon a student’s level of extrinsic confidence and most of these have to do with his or her attitude to the language. This in turn will be affected by the attitude of those who have influence with that student; if the parents are very much against the culture of the language being taught this will probably affect his or her self-confidence in a negative way. If they are very much in favor of the language this may have the opposite effect”

(Davis, 1990, p.127)

The student’s peers (his or her equals) will also be in a powerful position to affect his or her attitude as will other members of the student’s community.

Another very important factor affecting the self-confidence of students is their previous experiences as language learners. If they were successful then they may be pre-disposed to success now. Failure then may mean they expect failure now.

As teachers it is clear that we cannot create extrinsic confidence as it comes in to the classroom from outside. It is clear, too, that students have to be prepared to take some responsibility for their own learning. But with that in mind we can still do our best to ensure that students view the language and learning experience in a positive light. We can do this by creating a positive attitude to the language and its speakers, and we can try to be certain that we are always supportive and encouraging to our students rather than being too critical and

destructive. *“While it is reasonable to suppose that many young learners have some degree of extrinsic confidence, and while it is clear that the attitude of students can be affected by members of their communities, there can be no doubt that intrinsic confidence plays a vital part in most student’s success as language learners. Many students bring no extrinsic confidence to the classroom. They may even have negative feelings about language learning. For them what happens in the classroom will be of vital importance in determining their attitude to the language, and in supplying confidence”* (Davis, 1990, p.132)

It is clearly the case that physical conditions have a great effect on learning and can alter a student’s self-confidence either positively or negatively. Classrooms that are badly lit and overcrowded can be excessively de-motivating, but unfortunately many of them exist in schools. Vitally important is the white board: is it easily visible? Is the surface in good condition? teachers should presumably try to make their classrooms as pleasant as possible. Even where conditions are bad it may be possible to improve the atmosphere with posters, student’s work, etc. on the walls.

We can say, then, that the atmosphere in which a language is learnt is vitally important: the cold grayness of much institutionalized education must be compensated in some way if it is not to have a negative effect on motivational confidence.

I think “adolescents” *“the period of time in a person’s life when they are developing into an adult”* (Cambridge Advanced Learners Dictionary, 2009) are perhaps the most interesting students to teach, but they can also present the teacher with more problems than any other age group.

“We can certainly not expect any well developed extrinsic confidence from the majority of our students and particularly the younger ones. We may hope, however, that the student’s attitude has been positively influenced by those around them. We have to remember that adolescents are often brittle! They will probably not be inspired by mere curiosity, and teacher approval is no longer of vital importance” (Gardner, 1972, p.17)

Indeed then, it seems important to remember that in some cases the teacher may not be considered by all of the students as the leader, but rather on occasion the potential enemy.

“Peer pressure” “the strong influence of a group, especially children, on members of that group to behave as everyone else does”

(Cambridge Advanced Learners Dictionary, 2009) will, be important. The teacher should never, then, forget that adolescents need to be seen in a good light by their peers, and that the changes taking place during that age mean they are easily prone to humiliation if the teacher is careless with criticism. But adolescents can also be highly intelligent if stimulated, and dedicated if involved. At this age, by setting the level too low the students may simply “switch off”: where as if it is too high they may become discouraged and de-motivated. It is the teacher’s task, too, to put language teaching into an interesting context for the students. More than anything else they have to be involved in the task and eager to accomplish it. The method by which students are taught must have some effect on their self-confidence. If they find it deadly boring they will probably become de-motivated, whereas if they have confidence in the method they will find it motivating. But perhaps this is the most difficult area of all to be certain of.

A student that already has a good deal of self-confidence will probably succeed whatever method (within reason) is used. It is also true that different students are more or less sympathetic to some particular methods depending on their expectations.

Teachers can recall students who felt that there was not enough grammar or enough conversation (depending on the student’s taste at the time)! Despite various attempts there is unfortunately no research which *clearly* shows the success of one method over another. What we do know, however, is that if the student loses confidence in the method he or she will become de-motivated. And as we have already established the student’s confidence in the method is largely in the hands of without doubt the most important factor affecting intrinsic confidence, *the teacher*.

I think the teacher’s personality and rapport he or she is able to establish with the students are of vital importance: so too is the ability to provide motivating and interesting classes which are based both on a knowledge of techniques and activities and upon our ability to inspire a motivational type of confidence in our students and have answers to their questions. Teachers must realize the positive effect success can have on helping to build a student’s self-confidence.

Evaluating the effectiveness of confidence building classes in Tottori College

In order to try and adequately evaluate the effectiveness of confidence building when taught in an English conversation class to Japanese junior college students I have decided to conduct a total of three quite different confidence building orientated classes to the same group of students periodically.

It is my intention to subsequently evaluate any clear or slight positive and negative developments that take place during each lesson. On completion of each lesson conclusions will be drawn and any deemed failures or successes will be duly evaluated and incorporated into the following class or indeed eliminated in order to try and evaluate the effectiveness as structurally as possible.

All three classes will be taught to a "Speech and Discussion" themed group of students with a maximum of seven students in attendance in each of the three classes. It should be noted that the age of the students present in each of the classes ranges from young adult to mature adult, being mostly young rather than mature. Also worth noting is the subject of gender. In each of the classes there are six females and one male.

As the emphasis of this research paper is to try and measure the real effectiveness of confidence building orientated classes I have decided to insure at the beginning of each of the classes to implement one specific teaching methodology in order to help the students individually as well as to help the general flow of the class.

My passed teaching experience has taught me that without implementing such instructions at the beginning of the class it is quite often the case

that specifically confidence building orientated classes have a tendency to become a little unstructured and can cause confusion rather than being well structured and thus helping to build a student's confidence which is the overall objective.

1) *Put the students in groups first.*

Before asking the students to discuss as a whole class, put them in groups first to try out the topic. This will allow them to give opinions in a less threatening environment than in front of the whole class. It will also give me as the teacher a chance to see if the topic of the class is interesting enough for the students. If it is not and as the teacher I then decide to end the discussion, this can then be done without the "loss of face" that accompanies the cancellation of a discussion session in front of the whole class.

2) *Give students a chance to prepare.*

Where a more formal discussion is due to take place students should be given a chance to prepare their opinions. If the students are being asked to discuss the role of family or the relative merits of television or personal tastes they need sufficient time in order to organize their thoughts and come up with arguments to support their case.

3) *Give students a specific task.*

One way of promoting discussion is to give the students a task as part of the discussion process. They can be given a list of controversial statements about a topic or situation and asked to make a specific choice.

Class 1 “The power of music”

- a) Seven students in attendance.
- b) Six females and one male student.
- c) The students will be put in groups first.

Upon completion of this class, students will recognize and exhibit positive attitudes, appear self-confident, and develop realistic expectations.

Objectives:

- a) Demonstrate a positive attitude
 - b) Appear self-confident when speaking
 - c) Develop an unprejudiced opinion
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- 1) The students are asked to write down the name of a song which they like. It can be any kind of song. They should not show this title to anyone else at this stage of the lesson.
 - 2) The teacher tells the students that they are going to discuss their song with a partner or in a group. They should tell their partner or group the title of their chosen song along with the following:

How the song makes them feel
What the song reminds them of
What the song makes them want to do
Where they would like to hear the song
 - 3) When the students have had enough time to tell each other about their songs the teacher can ask if any one heard anything particularly interesting that they would like to share with the group.

In this class the students were *not* encouraged by the teacher very much to try and use the title of their favorite song in order to provoke a discussion about personal feelings and memories.

This class was *purposefully* conducted in a very somber and unsupportive manner and for the duration of the class the atmosphere was mostly negative. I think the main reason the class felt like it had a mostly negative atmosphere and was almost certainly unsuccessful was that the students were *not* really encouraged by the teacher to openly talk and share information about personal ideas and feelings. The students were intentionally expected to try and meet with all of the objectives by themselves and thus unfortunately were not very successful. However one objective which was met with was: a) Demonstrate a positive attitude. The students (for the most part) did seem to understand what they were being asked to do, but it was clear from almost all of the student’s body language, facial gestures and their considerably short responses when asked a direct question by another student, that they were not comfortable with the rather negative atmosphere in the class.

As a teacher I could recognize quite clearly that even though all of the students were really not very comfortable when asked to speak in a group atmosphere such as this, I could still identify that the *individual* attitudes of all of the students were actually still positive. This was especially evident when at the end of the class I decided to purposely speak to each of the student’s on an individual basis.

It seems quite evident already that when trying to instill confidence a supportive and reassuring atmosphere is a favorable one.

Class 2 "Arranging to meet"

- a) Five students in attendance.
- b) Four females and one male student.
- c) Give students a chance to prepare.

Upon completion of this class, students will recognize and exhibit positive attitudes, appear self-confident, and develop realistic expectations.

Objectives:

- a) Demonstrate a positive attitude
 - b) Appear self-confident when speaking
 - c) Develop an unprejudiced opinion
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- 1) The teacher tells the class that they are going to work in a group of five, and that they are going to arrange to meet each other for a Christmas celebration.
 - 2) The teacher explains that the group must decide where they should meet and when, based on the information that they will be given.
 - 3) The teacher tells the students that they will be given some pieces of paper, and they should not show each other. The teacher distributes the following:

STUDENT A: You would like to have Christmas lunch in a restaurant. You should think of reasons why this is the best choice.

STUDENT B: You would like to have Christmas dinner at your home. You should think of reasons why this is the best choice.

STUDENT C: You would like to have Christmas lunch at your home. You should think of reasons why this is the best choice.

STUDENT D: You would like to have Christmas dinner at a restaurant. You should think of reasons why this is the best choice.

STUDENT E: You are still undecided. You should listen to all of the other student's ideas and then agree with the suggestion you like best.

- 4) The teacher tells the students to think carefully about their instructions for a short time. Then the students are asked to start the activity.

In this class the students were asked to try and arrange to meet each other in order to celebrate Christmas. The students had to agree when and where the celebration would take place.

This class was very successful in developing the student's confidence and managed to produce a great deal of spoken English. As the teacher I found it necessary to keep an eye on the group and had to sometimes act as a prompter to insure that all of the students realized that there were two important variables being used in this class – where they were going to meet and when.

This class was *purposely* conducted in a very active, supportive manner and for the duration of the class the atmosphere seemed very positive.

The students were *often* encouraged whilst also being reassured by the teacher on a very regular basis, that talking openly about personal choice or indeed disagreeing with another person's choice doesn't always have to feel intimidating, but instead can sometimes feel enjoyable.

All the students met the objectives of the class but initially found: c) Develop an unprejudiced opinion, difficult to begin with, but then after sufficient reassurance from the teacher a lot more manageable.

Class 3 “A moral dilemma”

- a) Six students in attendance.
- b) Five females and one male student.
- c) Give students a specific task.

Upon completion of this class, students will recognize and exhibit positive attitudes, appear self-confident, and develop realistic expectations.

Objectives:

- a) Demonstrate a positive attitude
- b) Appear self-confident when speaking
- c) Develop an unprejudiced opinion

- 1) The students are told they are helping to supervise an important university exam and they see a student cheating with notes that he or she has illegally brought into the examination room. The students are then given four different possible courses of action to take:

- a) Ignore the incident.
- b) Warn the student that if she or he is seen cheating again they will be reported to university authorities.
- c) First ask the student to leave the examination, tear up his or her exam and then mark him or her as absent.
- d) Immediately report the student to the authorities, in which case they will be asked to leave university.

- 2) Students are put into pairs to try and reach an *initial* consensus on this issue.

- 3) The three pairs are then joined into one group of six students where a more formal discussion takes place with each individual pairing encouraged to openly talk about the initial consensus they reached and the reasons why.

- 4) Finally each individual student is asked to present a short speech in which they should outline as clearly as possible the consensus they have reached and the reasons why.

In this class the students were given a situation and alternative suggestions for acting in such a situation. The situation the students were asked to think about was (intentionally) very difficult.

Because this was the final class used for the purposes of this research paper, before the class I made a conscious decision that during the class I *shouldn't* be too encouraging or be too reassuring because I wanted to be able to evaluate how much the students self-confidence had been effected.

I was more than gratified to see that apart from the final part of the class when the students were asked to present a short speech and to talk about the final consensus that they had reached on an individual basis which they did still (inevitably) find to be a little intimidating, that the preceding part of the class managed to provoke some really self-assured points of view which by comparison with the first class especially would suggest to me that overall a vast improvement with regards to specifically self-confidence has taken place.

During class the students seemed to be a great deal more relaxed and confident if encouraged and reassured only when *really* needed.

Conclusion

I have often asked myself: How can I teach Japanese college students to be better speakers of English? Why do some of my students seem to understand their reading material well and are capable when it comes to writing an acceptable report on that reading, but are very reluctant to verbally challenge an author's or anybody's opinions? Why are students quite often more silent than out spoken? What can I do to help them participate more confidently during class activities?

What, then, makes Japanese students behave in a way that perplexes so many foreign teachers? Part of the answer can be found in their unique cultures. *"A culture which has been greatly influenced by Buddhism and Confucianism and systems of thought that honor and nurture conformity, obedience, and passivity. Such values are fundamental in achieving and preserving the general harmony and social cohesion"*

(Paine, 1996, pp. 28) In addition to this, their previous education has also played an important role in shaping their behavior when in my classes.

Because of the strong influence of the Confucian system of learning, the people of Japan, throughout history, have attached great value to education and have always shown profound respect for scholars and teachers. Teachers are considered not only experts in what they teach, but also as important spiritual guides in a student's pursuit of knowledge; therefore, a teacher's word is like an imperial edict, carrying absolute power. Students are expected to show total obedience or submission to their teachers. To disobey one's teacher is like defying one's father.

In Japanese classrooms, the central duty of a teacher is to impart knowledge, and that of a student is to absorb whatever the educator has to deliver. Lecturing by the teacher is the prevalent method. *"Students are passive receivers of knowledge, but construction or transformation of that knowledge is not seen as an essential part of their learning"* (Paine, 1996, pp. 39) Students need only listen intently to the instructor and copy verbatim from the whiteboard. The teacher is the specialist on the subject he or she is teaching. His or her explanations along with interpretations are both authoritative and definitive. If a student dares to challenge or argue, the student is seen as disrespectful and will be scorned by the whole class.

"Students in Japanese classrooms by their very nature seem to offer little input into the class. Interaction and meaningful exchanges between the teacher and students are limited if not completely absent. Discussion among students is also alien. After all, students are learners; learners are expected to acquire knowledge not contribute in the learning process. Although there may be a limited number of questions from the teacher, almost all of which are to be answered by students who are called on, students are usually not encouraged or given many chances to ask questions. A question is seen as a sign of slow learning, a sign of deficiency; therefore, students more often than not try to avoid asking questions in class" (Bachman, 1990, p. 132)

The techniques when teaching Japanese second language students self-confidence seem to vary according to the age of the learner. The younger students are more eager to grasp and their focus in the beginning is more on cramming any new vocabulary, sentences and simple phrases. Thus,

with the passage of time their familiarity with the subject increases and it's easier to teach them directly in the second language itself. The students in this age group are more reliant on their teachers and the surrounding environment and thus if an honest proper English speaking environment is created they are eager to get modeled into it without much resistance. Although, caution should be followed with some students as their inability to grasp may turn them hostile towards reception and they may lose their confidence in the language.

When attempting to teach a Japanese second language young adult student self-confidence the approach must be different. Because of their increased worldly experience and more developed “self-esteem” “*belief and confidence in your own ability and value*” (Cambridge Advanced Learners Dictionary, 2009) they might be more reserved in accepting the language easily. These students seem to have more of a problem regarding cramming as told by the teacher and because of their outer exposure the new formation of a close English speaking environment is usually not possible. They hesitate a lot in speaking the second language and they sometimes suffer from mother tongue influence in pronunciation of the second language. Thus, it becomes imperative to go slower with them and to try and generate a self confidence and motivation in them. They seem to have a better understanding of the structure and their ability to grasp words is also evidently good but even so because of their own experiences they sometimes show reluctance in acceptance and might be argumentative in accepting some things unlike younger learners. They are in a transition stage from a first language which they have been speaking for the better part of their life and thus

their whole understanding is modeled in that first language itself.

I think when starting with the second language directly as followed by some institutions results in a direct barrier for the students. Surely they can't be initiated or expected to have reached any significant level of self-confidence like this.

I think it is important to remember once the teacher is sure that the students have started showing their own self-confidence in the language they should be asked to reduce the usage of their first language and start expressing themselves more in the second language itself. It should be kept in mind however that young learners of a second language can't be expected to immediately have enough self-confidence to interact with each other in the second language. This is because of a lack of interaction with native speakers of that second language and thus their fluency might not be very rapid. The teacher must remain patient.

Confidence Building

“Self-esteem is an experience. It is a particular way of experiencing the self. It is a good deal more than a mere feeling – this must be stressed. It involves emotional, evaluative, and cognitive components. It also installs certain action dispositions: to move toward life rather than away from it; to move toward consciousness rather than away from it; to treat facts with respect rather than denial; indeed to try and operate self-responsibly rather than the opposite. It is confidence in the efficiency of our mind, in our ability to think” (Brandon, 2010, p. 7)

Teacher's views on the teaching of “Confidence Building” to adolescents seem to vary enormously.

Some love it, and would not choose to teach any other kind of age range. Probably almost as many, however, find it difficult, often more difficult the older the adolescent students become. The first important point to make, however, is that it is difficult, if not impossible, to generalize about the real effectiveness of teaching confidence to any adolescent culture let alone specifically Japanese.

“There is enormous variation in the nature of the adolescent period from individual to individual, and from culture to culture. In some cultures, children seem to remain children longer; in others they appear to grow up very quickly. Some adolescents find the movement from being a child to being an adult a very troublesome one, whilst others do not experience any particular problems” (Bachman, 1990, p. 139)

What is clear is that during the period of adolescence, an individual’s sense of who they are may often go through many transformations. Bodily changes as well as rapid changes in opinions, tastes, habits, and relations between the sexes may combine to give the impression that it is not just one person we are dealing with, but several.

“Teachers of adolescents often report that the period can place great strain on their relationship with the student. Adolescents may well be seeking independence and this in turn may conflict with the views of the teachers. As the time may be a period of great change for the adolescent, they may seem restless and unsure if they are doing what they want to do or should be doing. They may also be anxious about the future” (Hoadley, 1977, p. 36)

Therefore during this somewhat difficult period a great deal of patience is required from the teacher.

Developing Japanese student self confidence

On reflection I think when helping to develop a Japanese junior college student’s self-confidence the teacher’s personality does matter a lot. But beyond that it is clear that teachers need to do everything possible to create a good rapport with their students. Partly this happens by providing interesting and motivating classes while partly this comes from such things as treating all the students the same and acting upon their hopes and aspirations. Teachers clearly need to be able to show that they know their subject well. They should be able to give clear instructions and examples and as far as possible have answers to the student’s questions.

Success during a confidence building orientated class or lack of it clearly plays a vital part in the continual self-confidence drive of Japanese junior college students. It seems that both complete failure and complete success can sometimes be de-motivating for the students.

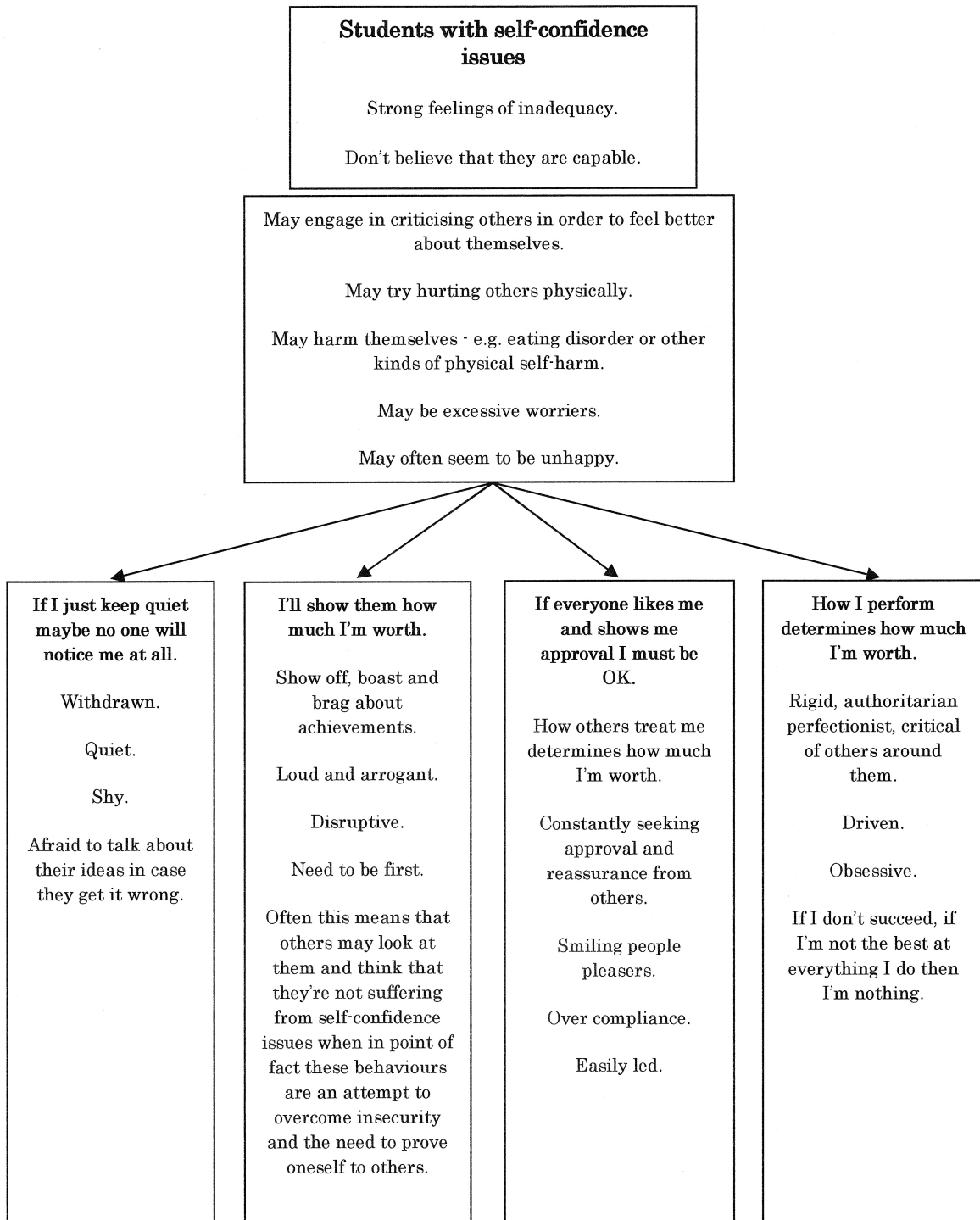
I think teachers need to always remember it is their job to set goals and tasks at which his or her students can be successful – or rather tasks which he or she could realistically expect specifically Japanese junior college students to be able to achieve. To give students very *high challenge* activities (high, because the level of difficulty for the students is extreme) where this is not appropriate seems to have a negative effect if one is trying to build a student’s self-confidence. It also seems the case that *low challenge* activities can be equally negative. If the students can achieve all of the tasks given to them with no real difficulty at all they seem to lose any confidence and subsequent motivation that they did have previously.

Conclusions drawn about the characteristics of Japanese junior college student’s self-confidence

Students with self-confidence issues do not all seem to conform to one pattern of behaviour.

There is sufficient evidence to show a variety of ways that self-confidence issues manifest themselves according to how they interact with the student’s personality.

The following table shows the different types of behaviour that result from having self-confidence issues.



I think that ultimately the student's success or failure with regards to acquiring a sufficient amount of self-confidence is in their own hands, but the teacher should understand that they too can greatly influence the course of events in the students favor if they so choose too.

I have concluded when attempting to teach a confidence building orientated class in a Japanese junior college essential considerations should be adhered too thus enabling the class to achieve a commendable level of effectiveness.

Be patient. Things may take longer to achieve in the classroom than you had probably initially anticipated. The students may seem tired or unwilling. Very often this is because of factors completely outside the classroom.

Be flexible. Conflicts can be avoided if the teacher is prepared to be flexible about when and how things are done. However you have to also make clear the limits of what is acceptable.

Be sensitive. As a teacher I have observed that adolescent students are frequently moody, they can be happy and bright one day and deflated the next day. As a teacher, it is important to keep note of these changes and, where necessary, talk to the student to see if they are having problems.

Allow choice and student decisions. It is also useful to be flexible about what the students do. If you can provide them with choice and allow room for personal interests, you are likely to find it much easier working with them. You should also try to involve them in decisions about what you will do during the lesson time and sometimes ask the students to plan the activities.

Show respect. The students must have a clear sense of respect for you as the teacher, but equally you must have a good sense of respect for them, recognizing for example, that their opinions,

tastes in clothes, music, etc. are equally valid. That said your role is as an educator, so it should remain your responsibility to encourage students to question what they are saying or doing, and to ensure that limits are set and maintained for the benefit of everyone.

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