<研究ノート>

Breaking Rules: Examining Fanselow's Theory and Observing a Student-Centered Language Learning Project in a CALL Classroom

Mariko MIYAO *

Abstract

This article is written as a research note for this author's presentation in a forum at JALT2011 in Tokyo. The forum will explore John Fanselow's ideas about teaching and learning with five presenters and Fanselow himself as a commentator. Therefore, in this paper, first, the notion of classroom observation advocated by Fanselow will be examined. Next, a new learner-centered, project-based writing activity of digital storytelling conducted in the fall semester in 2010 will be described as an example of classroom observation and then some unexpected findings will be analyzed in line with Fanselow's theory of *Breaking Rules*.

抄　録

本稿は、JALT2011のフォーラムでの筆者の発表のための研究ノートとして書かれている。フォーラムでは、John Fanselow の教育および学習に関する理論について筆者を含む 5 名の発表があり、Fanselow 氏が最後にコメントを述べることになっている。そのため、本稿では、最初に Fanselow の推奨する classroom observation（教室内の観察）の考え方について調べ、次に、2010年後期に実施した、学生中心のプロジェクト形式ライティング活動であるデジタル・ストーリーテリングについて説明する。また、Fanselow の Breaking Rules の理論に沿って教室内の学生や教員自身について観察した結果、偶然見えてきたことについても言及する。

Introduction

This research note is written as a preparation for a presentation in a forum of five presenters at JALT2011, 37th Annual International Conference of JALT (the Japan Association of Language Teaching), to be held in Tokyo, November 18-21, 2011. In the forum featuring John Fanselow's notion of classroom observation, Fanslow himself will be the commentator to sum up the five presentations. This research note, therefore, will summarize some ideas and approaches of Fanselow, which strongly influenced and motivated many teachers including this author. Next, a recently conducted student-centered, project-based activity of digital storytelling in a CALL

＊　情報コミュニケーション学部情報メディア学科、Tsukuba Gakuin University

classroom and some findings through the teacher's classroom observation will be explained and analyzed in line with Fanselow's notion of classroom observation.

The following is the proposal submitted by the team of five presenters and accepted by the JALT2011 program team:

Forum title: Observing Classrooms and Breaking Rules

"Over the past 30 years, John Fanselow has made a significant contribution to EFL education in Japan, through his writing and teaching. This panel explores Prof. Fanselow's ideas about learning with papers inspired by his notion of classroom observation. Five speakers present various aspects of observing university EFL classrooms, with concluding commentary by Prof. Fanselow.

Fanselow defined classroom observation as essential because it allows teachers to recognize unconscious patterns in the culture of instruction, particularly unexamined practices and ingrained assumptions about how talk and learning take place. Fanselow advocates questioning prescribed suggestions about teaching: When teachers "do the opposite," they better understand what instruction and learning actually mean.

The first speaker outlines the philosophical groundwork of Breaking Rules as it relates to teachers who have studied under Fanselow, and looks at practical applications and influences on teaching style.

The second speaker explores practices of curriculum development, foregrounding observation as a tool for building consensus about the kind of curriculum that is put in place in the classroom.

The third speaker explains how observation has been used by program administrators as an extension of course evaluation to follow-up instruction that goes above and beyond the curriculum, with potential to impart program-wide benefits.

The fourth speaker investigates the intention to introduce scaffolded discourse, with a grounded analysis of how students do and (importantly) do not pick up extended patterns of talk.

The fifth speaker describes unexpected findings generated by an observation of student-centered language learning projects conducted in a CALL classroom."

The last paragraph is for this author's presentation: "The fifth speaker describes unexpected findings generated by an observation of student-centered language learning projects conducted in a CALL classroom."

As the title of the forum "Observing Classrooms and Breaking Rules" suggests, each of the five presentations in the forum will focus different areas and aspects of Fanselow's notion of classroom observation and his various achievements in his career in education. All or the majority of the presenters are graduates from Teachers College (TC), Columbia University, in New York or Tokyo campus, where Dr. Fanselow's Classroom Observation course was one of the first courses for students to take. The textbook used for the course was titled "Breaking Rules" written by John Fanselow. I attended his course of classroom observation in the summer of 1990.

The Teachers College TESOL courses in Tokyo were targeted at teachers with at least 2 to 3 years of classroom teaching experience. My classmates were mostly very experienced teachers

with full of teaching knowledge, ideas, and energy. I had just started teaching in April of the same year (1990) after about 20 years of working in the business sector in Japan, the U.S., and Canada, in various industries including universities. I hoped to learn practical teaching techniques, theories, and approaches in the TC's TESOL courses. I was a novice teacher, and had no idea of breaking rules. I did not have any rules to break either. However, after many years of teaching since that first summer at TC, I realize the importance of classroom observation and occasional acts of breaking rules advocated by Fanselow to analyze students and to see things differently as a teacher.

Fanselow's Notion of Classroom Observation

First, some of the classroom observation ideas of Fanselow that have influenced many practicing teachers will be examined by mainly referring to his book *Breaking Rules* used in the course of classroom observation.

Heuristic Approach

Maley (2005), by categorizing Fanselow's notion of observation as a heuristic, explains that "the best-known heuristic in our field was provided by John Fanselow in his book *Breaking Rules* (1987). In this book, he urges us to 'Do the opposite.'" According to Maley (n.d.), Fanselow "suggests that, if we carefully examine what we habitually do in our classes and then try to do the opposite, we may stumble upon some interesting new ways of proceeding." Maley (n.d.) also explains that "Fanselow's point, which is worth thinking about, is that if we never try an alternative way of doing things, we never know what might have happened!"

Learner-centered Education

Regarding *learner-centered education*, Fanselow (2011) says, "the most powerful learning takes place when we are in charge and seek answers to our own questions, whether we are learning languages or ways to teach languages, or anything else."

Students learn a great deal when they are engaged in a student-centered language learning activity, because they think actively and clearly while trying to figure out what to do and to find necessary information in their own work. As a teacher, we also learn a great deal by looking for and creating such an activity for our students and then observing them while they are engaged in the activity.

Incidental Learning

Fanselow (1987) in the book *Breaking Rules*, explains about incidental learning as follows: "In all of life, we learn a great deal incidentally (p.168)," and "deliberate, conscious attempts to learn are effective partly because we alternate them with unplanned, unconscious moments of learning (p. 169)."

Looking at Teaching from a Different Perspective

Fanselow (1987) explains about the content of the book that the "material you are about to read is basically just a way of looking at teaching from a different perspective so that you see teaching and discussions of teaching differently (p.2)." In a different page, he says that the "aim of this book is ultimately to see teaching differently (p.165)."

He suggests that by doing something different or new, we will have a chance to put ourselves at a different angle. Or just doing the same routine differently, you and your students may find new ways of teaching and learning. We sometimes forget this simple approach and become frustrated if the same old approach does not work out suddenly with a different type of students or on that particular day with the same students. If we can see our teaching differently, then we feel more relaxed and can try new activities more easily and enthusiastically.

Doing the Opposite, Breaking Rules, and Doing Something New

Fanselow (1987) tells us that the aim of the book *Breaking Rule* is to see teaching differently and says, "To reach this aim, I have urged you to systematically describe communications, make generalizations or rules about them, and then generate alternatives by substituting other communications and thus breaking the rules you discover (p.165)."

Purpose of the Observation System: To Look, Not Judge

"Because the purpose of my observation system is to describe communications in order to discover rules, and not to improve teaching, the descriptions need not be concerned with either implicit or explicit judgments (p.20)." He informs us of the importance of objective observation to find out more about our teaching.

"Observing highlights the fact that the purpose of the observation system is to look, not judge (p.19)" he concludes. He encourages teachers to observe without judging. He reminds us of the importance of being objective when we observe our students.

He suggests us to do the opposite, but he also suggests us to do as follows. "Trying an alternative for a few minutes or even a few seconds breaks a rule the same as if we try an alternative for an entire period, for a few hours or for several days (p.169)."

This approach is closer to what I usually try to do in my teaching. By trying an alternative in a small scale, teachers can still learn to observe and notice the effects of the new approach and gradually can try other alternatives.

Brief Definitions of Digital Storytelling, Digital Stories, and Digital Storytellers

According to *the Educational Uses of Digital Storytelling* website, **digital storytelling** is "the practice of using computer-based tools to tell stories." Wikipedia defines that **digital storytelling** is the "process by which people of all ages and experience share with others stories from their lives or creative imagination." Digital storytelling is a good teaching tool. Students can share their stories with people from other countries over the Internet. In addition, students first read, view, and listen

to various stories written by people from all over the world before venturing into creating their own stories. It is an authentic reading and listening activity that teachers can offer in the classroom very effectively.

The Center for Digital Storytelling site defines a **digital story** as a "short, first person video-narrative created by combining recorded voice, still and moving images, and music or other sounds," and a **digital storyteller** is a person "who has a desire to document life experience, ideas, or feelings through the use of story and digital media."

Wikipedia explains about student created digital stories as follows: "Students can work individually or collaboratively to produce their own digital stories. Once completed, these stories can easily be uploaded to the Web and viewed by a worldwide audience." This was the main reason why this project was experimented in the fall semester of 2010.

Digital Storytelling: A Student-centered Project in a CALL Classroom

The idea of the digital storytelling project occurred to me when I attended a presentation by Naoko Kasami, Obirin University, at LET 50, in Yokohama in September 2010. One of the activities offered to her students in her course in a computer room was "Digital Storytelling using Windows Movie Maker."

The activity seemed suitable for the third-year students in the course titled "Learning English on the Web." I had never used the software myself but a student who was working on her graduation thesis under my supervision was using Windows Movie Maker in her graduation project to create and edit movie videos to be uploaded to the Youtube site. If there were any problems, I thought I could ask for her help. Also, the presenter kindly sent me via e-mail the instruction she had made for her students about how to use the software. In addition, there are many useful Websites, for instance, how to use Windows Movie Maker, how to conduct the digital storytelling project, and interesting digital stories created by many different people, including ESL/EFL learners in many parts of the world.

Project Procedure: Digital Storytelling with Windows Movie Maker

The following is the procedure of the digital storytelling writing/narrating project experimented in the fall semester in 2010.

1: Explanation of the Project
Explain about what the digital storytelling is and introduce some useful and interesting websites for digital storytelling.
● **Center for Digital Storytelling <http://www.storycenter.org/>**. Click "stories" and choose stories under the categories: "Community," "Education," "Family," "Youth," "Health," "Identity," and "Place." Students can read various stories created by native and non-native speakers of English in different countries and cultures.

● **BBC Digital Storytelling - Telling Lives: Your digital stories <http://www.bbc.co.uk/tellinglives/>** You can watch and listen to various digital stories created by British citizens. Many of the films are probably too difficult for EFL (English as a Foreign Language) learners. Nonetheless, they can learn some very useful techniques from those digital stories.

Also, show students sample stories by the teacher and/or previous year's student works.

● **A sample story** created by the teacher: (See "My Trip to Liverpool at <http://www3.tsukuba-g.ac.jp/t/miyao/engweb/index.html>. Click the "small-sized digital story" or the "large-sized digital story."

● **Student-created stories in 2010** can be viewed at the above mentioned course website, under "Fall 2010: Digital Stories by Students."

2. Brainstorming

After browsing digital stories, have a brainstorming session with your students. While checking what kinds of photos they have in their file servers, they usually come up with their own story ideas.

3. Learning How to Use Windows Movie Maker

Teach how to use Windows Movie Maker, for example, how to start a new project, import photos, and how to save the project, and the differences between a project file and a completed final version of a movie file.

There are many websites explaining how to use the video editing software. The following are examples of the websites and manuals used for this project.

● "Getting started with Windows Movie Maker" and other related pages at: <http://windows.microsoft.com/en-US/windows-vista/Getting-started-with-Windows-Movie-Maker>

● The Japanese versions of the same manual at: <http://windows.microsoft.com/ja-JP/windows-vista/Getting-started-with-Windows-Movie-Maker/>

The "Work with projects in Windows Movie Maker" page is useful because it explains about the differences between a project file and a movie file. (See the page at: <http://windows.microsoft.com/en-US/windows-vista/Work-with-projects-in-Windows-Movie-Maker>.)

Two more resources were used for the project.

● The manual created by Mie University students at: <http://ravel.edu.mie-u.ac.jp/~dst/>

● The manual sent from Naoko Kasami via e-mail

Using these 3 resources, a sample story titled "My trip to Liverpool" was created before the project was offered to the students in 2010.

4. Creating Digital Stories by Using Students' Own Photos

Have students arrange their photos (about 8 photos to use) and then start creating their own stories. Usually, they write stories in Japanese first and then translate them into English. This

process needs about three to five class hours depending on students' English abilities and their project contents.

5. Recording Narration

Explain how to record narration. There are two ways to record narration.

1. *Using the sound recorder in the Windows programs*

Click "Programs -- Accessories -- Entertainment --Sound Recorder. You can record for 60 seconds at one take. Name and save the files in a folder for the digital story. Then you can import the files into Movie Maker.

2. *Using the tools menu in Movie Maker.*

Click the *Tools* menu and then *Narrate Timeline* to record your voice. Details of recording and adding narration are shown at "Add narration to your movie" page at the Microsoft's "Getting started with Windows Movie Maker" site.

6. Completing the Project and Saving the Story into a Movie File

Students have been working on a project file up to this stage. After completing necessary tasks to create a story, students are ready to save the digital story into a movie file. (See details of how to save a project file into a movie file at the "Publish a movie in Windows Movie Maker" page in the Microsoft website.)

When students have completed and saved the final version of the stories, have them upload the digital stories to their individual webpages. Create a link page to jump to the student-created story pages.

Findings

Maley (2004), in his reference to Fanselow's *Breaking Rules*, says that if they (teachers) "never try anything different, however small, they never find out how it might have changed things." Also, he says that when "we change our customary practice, we become more aware of the effects of what we do." Therefore, in this section, I will examine what was found by conducting the new writing project of digital storytelling.

a. Reading, Listening, and Viewing Digital Stories over the Web

The purpose of this writing project is to give students an opportunity to write creatively using their own ideas. Before starting to write their own stories, they have a chance to read, view, and listen to digital stories created by many people from all over the world. Those stories are authentic reading, listening, and viewing materials. Moreover, while they are exposed to those authentic materials, they can acquire deeper understanding of other people, cultures, and countries, and the outside world surrounding them.

I had not been aware of those many different digital stories existing on the Internet until when I

tried to find some websites to be used as sample stories. I enjoyed viewing, reading, and listening to various stories myself. Some stories may be too difficult for students if they just read, however, with digital stories, students receive various stimuli by reading, listening, and also visually by viewing. This helps their understanding tremendously.

b. Movie Maker, the New Software to Use and Learn

In the course "Learning English on the Web," several kinds of software or Internet tools have been used to conduct student-centered project-based activities to enhance students' writing skills. A small group of students who attend the course are majoring in *informatics and media studies* and are very skillful in using networked computers in general. The majority of other students in the department are not very fond of studying English, but this handful of students like to study English by saying that they want to be exposed to some English before graduating. Although they are rather reluctant to speak up in the classroom, but become active and creative in such a project using computers and the Internet. Therefore, I have been offering writing projects using different software and Internet tools.

Some examples of software used in the course are: Study Note, Hot Potatoes, and Homepage Builders. For example, using Study Note, students write original quizzes or stories using still and moving pictures and sounds. With Hot Potatoes, they can make pre-formatted quizzes like crosswords, matching quizzes, or cloze tests. With Homepage Builders, they create their own websites in English.

By using Windows Movie Maker, students not only write their own stories, but also narrate what they have written. Using Study Note, students can add narration by using the sound recorder, but first they must write a story, draw or paint pictures to go with the story, and their time is up before they can start recording narration. Moreover, the most of them are reluctant to do this extra work of recording and adding the sound files into their works. However, with Movie Maker, the procedure is simpler. What they have to do is to arrange photos, write the story, and then narrate it. The procedure is much simpler. Students can concentrate more on the content of the project, which is writing and narrating, rather than spending more time on learning to use the software or drawing pictures in the drawing/painting software.

c. Recording and Adding Narration

When making a sample digital story, I used the sound recorder in the Windows programs. Later, I found out that the students used the tool Narrate Timeline in the Movie Maker and saved their narrations directly in the software's project file. It is much easier to do.

Nonetheless, the experience of recording was very useful because I could understand what my students would go through. Recording your voice is not so easy or simple as you might think it is. You feel awful when you listen to your own voice for the first time. I am not a native speaker and I know my limitation in speaking naturally, but I sounded very awkward and monotonous when I listened to my recorded narration for the first time. I did not speak very clearly or loudly enough. So, I practiced several times until I thought I spoke more naturally. By actually recording narration

myself, I was able to put myself in my students' shoes. Now, I can recommend them with confidence to practice before actually recording narration.

However, I did not expect that my students would actually practice speaking before recording narration. They would record narration by reading aloud just once, I thought. When I finally got time to listen to their stories after the fall semester ended, I found out that all of them did a great job in narrating their stories. They all seemed to have practiced narrating the stories before recording their narrations. This was a very pleasant surprise. Some of them probably spent some time out of class to practice and record narration when there was nobody around in the CALL classroom.

I assume that even a professional voice actor would practice many times to master the craft of speaking and narrating. Maybe many of the students felt the same way. If I did not try this new project, I probably would still think that the students taking this course would always be reluctant to speak much less narrate their own stories.

This is a very good example of ″a way of looking at teaching from a different perspective″ for me. If I had not offered such a project to my students, I would have never realized that those same students who speak monotonously or reluctantly when reading a textbook aloud in class would really practice to make their narrated stories better.

d. Different Learning Styles

There were a very small number of students in the course and I was able to observe them when they were working on their stories. Some of them needed more time to find photos for their stories. I wondered if they could finish the project in time or if this kind of writing project would be too difficult for them. One student spent a great deal of time in choosing appropriate photos for his story. I realized later that he just needed time to select the appropriate photos out of his large photo collection. He finished his stories in time, after all. When I checked his narrated story, he sounded very enthusiastic about talking about the many photos he had taken.

On the other hand, one female student completed her story way ahead of the deadline. She had had experience of using the software before and decided on what to write about, almost from the beginning. Her friend sitting next to her also jumped right in writing her own story. This student had a harder time in writing in English, but both of them seemed to enjoy the project and helped and gave advice to each other. Their cheerful and pleasant attitudes and eagerness to tackle the project set a very good atmosphere in the CALL classroom. Other students (all male students) were rather quiet and were working individually without talking to other students. While observing their learning styles, I realized the importance of objective observation. We tend to judge by just looking at our students. Even when they look very slow or lazy, they may be thinking about what to do in their own ways. To find out more about their learning styles in such a project-based activity, I try to talk to individual students and ask about the progress of the particular day for a few minutes each, and when it is not possible, then I ask them to submit a progress report in handwriting at the end of the class. In this way, students seem to open up more and talk to the teacher about what they are doing and what they want to do next, etc. Then, you will get a chance to find out more about your students and their learning styles.

e. A Visit of an Intern to Help Students Revise

Just before the fall semester started in 2010, teachers of English were informed that an intern (more like an assistant teacher or a teacher trainee) would come to stay at our university for a few months. The intern was from the U.S., in mid-twenties, and just graduated from college. After adjusting his schedules with him and other teachers, he visited my course of "Learning English on the Web" three or four times during the semester. It was around the time when some of the students were about to finish writing. So, I asked him to help the students revise their stories. Before asking him to help, I corrected minor grammatical mistakes. Talking to a native speaker and asking him to help gave the students a very good opportunity to think about their works seriously and improve the content as much as possible.

In the beginning, I was not sure how I could use this intern's help effectively in my course, but it turned out to be a very good opportunity for the students to revise and practice narrating with him in addition to their regular teacher. They tried hard to communicate with him with a little help from the teacher. While the Intern was talking with a student, I could help other students, or if the Intern had a hard time understanding a particular student's writing, I could help both of them by becoming a kind of mediator. Also, having a native speaker visiting and helping in the classrrom created a good learning environment for both the teacher and the students.

f. Using Photos from Students' Own Photo Collection

In the project, the students were assigned to choose about eight photos or so from their own photo collections and tell a story or report on a topic using those photos.

The student-created stories in 2010 are as follows:
- My Bus Tour in Shinshu (About a trip to Shinshu and Yamanashi area in one summer)
- Battledore Fair (About a year-end battledore fair in Asakusa)
- My Photo Collection (About various kinds of photos this student had been taking)
- Trip to Lake Kawaguchi (About a summer vacation with his friends)
- Park Survey in Tsukuba (About a course assignment for surveying the parks in the city)
- Trip to visit Mt. Aso (About a trip to the mountain with friends when he lived in Kyushu.)

All the students chose different topics more or less although three of them wrote about their trips (to different locations!). Because they wrote about their memorable events in their lives, their stories were very interesting with nice effects and transitions between photos thanks to Movie Maker and of course with their good narrations.

Conclusion

The problem many teachers face when conducting a project-based activity in a CALL classroom is that, sometimes, we do not know if students are really engaged in their own project or something else. If you feel uneasy, it will be a good time to observe your students and the classroom activity objectively. To help me observe the classroom activities and students, and see my teaching from a different perspective in the CALL classroom, I usually talk to each student about his or her work

progress on that particular day. In this way, students open up more and talk to the teacher about what they are doing, what they want to do next, and what troubles them, etc.

In the fall semester in 2010, I had an opportunity to look at my teaching from a different perspective by going through a new classroom project using a new Internet tool. As a result, I was able to find several new things about my students, the content of the project, and my teaching. I found that my students not only wrote interesting stories but also narrated their stories very well. My students practiced speaking because they had a good reason to do it. There are many interesting digital stories to read, listen to, and view in the Internet. My students and I had an unexpected help from a visiting intern. These are a just a few of my unexpected findings I witnessed in the fall semester in 2010.

If there is a chance, I would like to explore to find more new tools for classroom projects in the CALL room, hopefully less complicated Internet tools such as Movie Maker, so that we can concentrate more on the content of teaching and learning English.

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Forum Presentation Proposal

Shea, D., Dias, J., O'Dowd, G., Bradley, W., & Miyao, M. (2011, November). In D. Shea (Chair), *Observing Classrooms and Breaking Rules*. Panel proposal submitted to the JALT2011 Program Team to be presented at the JALT2011, Tokyo, Japan.

URLs of the Websites Mentioned in This Paper

The Center for Digital Storytelling site: <http://www.storycenter.org/>

"Digital storytelling" in Wikipedia: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Digital_storytelling>

"The Educational Uses of Digital Storytelling" site at the University of Houston: <http://digitalstorytelling.coe.uh.edu/>