

Action research on ways to reduce anxiety and improve Japanese students' English oral communication in panel discussions with native speakers

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Abstract

Action research was conducted on how to reduce anxiety and improve Japanese university students' oral communication in panel discussions with native-level English speakers. Quantitative data was collected using a 5-point Likert Scale; qualitative data was collected and analyzed on a weekly basis in the form of a teaching journal and student written reflections. Teaching approach and the classroom environment were adjusted weekly, based on the data. Results showed that while many students felt that support from their peers, friendly panelists, and a teacher with a nice demeanor helped reduce their anxiety, comprehension difficulty and their frequent inability to formulate follow-up questions interfered most with their communication ability. Research on communication strategy training could better inform a future study on ways to improve oral communication in class.

Keywords: action research, anxiety, communication strategies, panel discussion

The researcher's university hosts an annual four-week intensive English summer program for first year Japanese students from a sister university in western Japan. Content in each year's curriculum is revised based on a needs assessment conducted with the home institution, feedback from students, and advice from teacher's who

taught in the previous year's program. One repeated request from the Japanese university was that students be given access to native speakers in the classroom so they would have chances to engage native speakers in academic discussions. The result was a class called *Panel Discussion*, where native and proficient English speakers from the local community would be invited to class on a weekly basis to share their perspectives on weekly cultural topics. Teachers who taught this class after the first trial run expressed concern that students seemed to be quieter or speak for a shorter time in the groups with the native speakers, than they did in the other classes in the program. The teachers speculated that anxiety was a key contributor to the problem. The following year, the researcher was asked to conduct research in her own panel discussion class over the course of the four week program to investigate her students' anxieties and ways to improve their oral communication in the group sessions.

Literature Review

Anxiety is a factor that may hinder participation in the ESL classroom. Students who suffer from *foreign language classroom anxiety* (Horwitz et al.,1986) may be good learners in other situations, strongly motivated, and have a sincere liking for speakers of the target language, but have difficulty participating in the classroom. Foreign language classroom anxiety most prominently affects oral performance (Young, 1990). Horwitz et al. (1986) attributed this anxiety to the fact that many students believe they should not say something in a foreign language until they can say it correctly. An early study by McCoy (1979) reported anxiety-causing factors identified by students and language teachers in relation to language production. These factors included pronunciation, the inability to answer questions, not understanding goals and requirements of the course, a native speaker teacher, and experiencing different cultural values and customs. A more recent survey study

(Williams & Andrade, 2008) conducted with Japanese EFL university students, reported similar results. The top four anxiety factors were (1) not knowing how to say something in English, (2) speaking in front of others, (3) pronunciation, and (4) being called on by the teacher/awaiting one's turn to speak.

Accepting the above mentioned as the main causes of foreign language classroom anxiety, the question arises: *Who is responsible for reducing anxiety in the classroom: the student, the teacher, or the class as a whole?* Williams and Andrade (2008) surveyed Japanese EFL students at universities throughout Japan to discover who or what they believed had the greatest control over anxiety in the classroom. Students were given nine categories to choose from. They attributed the greatest control of anxiety to the category of *teacher*, at approximately 51%. The category *self* was selected as the second most influential, at 14%. Thus, in the context of Williams and Andrade's study, Japanese students put a great amount of responsibility for anxiety management on the teacher.

Horwitz et al. (1986), Young (1990), McCoy (1979), and Tsui (1996) all focus on the teacher's role in language anxiety management. Some anxiety can be reduced by the teacher's demeanor. Students in Young's study (1990) stated how a friendly, patient and relaxed teacher is a great help in reducing anxiety. Horwitz et al. (1986) also mentioned how a supportive teacher could alleviate anxiety and build confidence. All these attributes will help students feel more comfortable with their teacher and less afraid of being evaluated. The teacher should also work on building classroom rapport (Williams & Andrade, 2008), allow students to practice speaking tasks in smaller groups before performing before the class as a whole (Young, 1990), and model successful language performances (McCoy, 1979) before students give performances of their own.

The way a teacher calls on students can also cause or reduce anxiety. Williams

and Andrade (2008) suggested that teachers refrain from random selection because students will feel on edge not knowing when or if they will be called on. However, Young, (1990) reported that calling on students in a predetermined order caused anxiety in some students as they awaited their turn. Young also stated that most students prefer to volunteer answers. However, Tsui's (1996) *maxim of modesty*, a term relating to Asian student's particular reluctance to speak out in class, would argue against a preference for volunteering answers within a Japanese group of students. The various conflicting suggestions in the literature bring to light an important consideration: alternating methods of calling on students in each new group one teaches, to determine which methods work best for a particular group of students.

Another major contributor to classroom anxiety is the fear of being evaluated on one's mistakes. In Young (1990), students felt less anxious about speaking in class if the teacher made it clear that they would not be harshly evaluated. Dörnyei (2001) urged teachers to avoid comparing students to each other and to promote cooperation over competition. A successful strategy used by teachers in Tsui's study (1996) was to let students know that there was not always one specific correct answer.

A final method that was successful in reducing anxiety was the focus on content. Young (1990) reported that students were less anxious when they were interested in the topic because they focused on the content rather than their fears. Tsui (1996) asserted that by focusing on under the threat of having their mistakes corrected. Dörnyei (1991) suggested student choice of some class topics, a factor taken into account in the present study.

Reoccurring themes emerge from the literature, such as students' desire to speak perfect English and their fear of being evaluated by teachers and peers. One gap, however, is exploring the additional anxiety students may have in speaking with fluent/native speakers they are not familiar with, such as panelists in the EFL classroom. The

present study addresses two main questions: (1) *What anxiety factors interfere with students' oral communication with fluent English speaking panelists in the classroom,* and (2) *What adjustments can be made to the classroom environment, researcher's pedagogy and curriculum to improve students' oral communication?*

Method

Participants

Participants in the study were 11 (10 female and 1 male) Japanese freshman from a university in Western Japan, who had chosen to do an optional summer intensive English program at the researcher's university in the United States.

Panel Discussion Class

The study was conducted in the researcher's section of the panel discussion class. The goal of the class was to improve students' discussion skills and allow them to interview native speaker guests from the local community about cultural topics. Class met twice weekly in 90 minute classes for four weeks. Tuesday classes were set aside for preparation and Thursday classes were reserved for discussion sessions with panelists. Preparation days involved readings to foster deeper understanding of the weekly topic and build vocabulary, reading autobiographies of upcoming panelists, and preparing discussion questions. In Thursday classes, students were divided into smaller groups equal to the number of panelists (usually 3-4 guests). Each panelist would sit for 10-20 minutes with one group, and then rotated to another group until all students had a chance to speak with them. Students also had time to practice before the panelists arrived and to reflect on their discussion experience after the panelists took their leave.

Data Collection

A 5-point Likert scale questionnaire was initially conducted to determine which anxiety factors had the greatest impact on the researchers group of students. Student feedback in the form of weekly reflection handouts and the researcher's own teaching journal were used as qualitative data.

The questionnaire. A 20-item 5-point Likert scale questionnaire was designed for this study, based on concepts from the literature and items featured in the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) by Horwitz et al. (1986). Students were given a Japanese translation of the questionnaire to ensure their comprehension of the items. The translation was also back-translated into English by a different translator to assure accurate translation (Nunan & Bailey, 2009).

Student written reflections. As part of the original syllabus, students were required to submit a written reflection for each panel discussion. Questions about anxiety were added to the reflection template in the researcher's class (Appendix A). The handout was revised after the first cycle (Appendix B) in order to elicit more detailed feedback from students. A reflection handout for the overall course (Appendix C) was distributed in the final cycle.

Reflective teaching journal. Bailey (1990) stated that reflective writings allow investigation of issues not normally accessible through outside observation, and are useful in generating behavioral changes and developing self-confidence in beginner teachers. The researcher wrote one journal entry after each class. Tuesday entries focused mainly on what actions the researcher would take to better prepare students for the upcoming discussion session; Thursday entries primarily focused on the success or failure of the new plan and any new issues that arose.

Procedures and Analysis

This study is an action research in four weekly cycles. A mixed-methods approach of data collection and analysis was used (Dörnyei, 2007). The 5-point Likert Scale questionnaire was conducted, collected and analyzed before the first day of class. It provided the only set of quantitative data, as foreign language anxiety can be reliably and validly measured according to Horwitz (1991). The mode was calculated for each separate item as shown in the Table below.

Table. Results of foreign language classroom anxiety questionnaire

<i>Likert Scale Score (1-5)</i>	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mode Score (N=11)
<i>Item #</i>	1	2	3	4	5	
<i>1. I like when the teacher models language use before we use it.</i>	0	0	1	7	3	4
<i>2. I don't worry about making mistakes in class.</i>	0	0	2	6	3	4
<i>3. I get nervous when the teacher randomly calls on me.</i>	2	3	3	2	1	2.5
<i>4. I get nervous when I don't understand the teacher.</i>	0	1	1	8	1	4
<i>5. I think the other students speak better English than I do.</i>	0	0	3	5	3	4
<i>6. I'm more confident about speaking after practicing in groups.</i>	0	2	4	3	2	3
<i>7. I'm embarrassed to volunteer answers in class.</i>	1	5	2	2	1	2
<i>8. I think people can understand my English even if it's not perfect.</i>	0	4	3	3	1	2
<i>9. I'm afraid the teacher will correct all my speaking mistakes.</i>	3	5	2	1	0	2
<i>10. I'm embarrassed speaking in front of the class.</i>	4	4	3	0	3	1.5
<i>11. I'm not afraid of the American style classroom.</i>	0	3	2	4	2	4
<i>12. A friendly teacher helps me relax when speaking.</i>	0	0	2	5	4	4
<i>13. Interesting topics make me less nervous.</i>	0	1	2	6	2	4

<i>Likert Scale Score (1-5)</i>	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mode Score (N=11)
<i>Item #</i>	1	2	3	4	5	
<i>14. I'm not nervous speaking with native speakers.</i>	0	2	5	3	1	3
<i>15. I like when the teacher lets us choose topics.</i>	0	1	3	5	2	4
<i>16. It's okay to ask questions when I don't understand.</i>	0	0	0	8	3	4
<i>17. I worry people won't understand my English.</i>	1	1	2	6	1	4
<i>18. It's the teacher's responsibility to make us calm and confident.</i>	1	3	5	1	1	3
<i>19. I understand the goals and requirements of class.</i>	0	1	4	4	2	3.5
<i>20. I feel more comfortable when I'm friendly with my classmates.</i>	0	0	1	4	6	5

Qualitative data was collected in weekly increments through the written student reflections and teacher journal, and reviewed to make improvements in the next cycle. A summary of the data and its weekly applications is organized into the four following cycle sections.

Cycle one

The researcher used the results from the questionnaire to determine which anxiety factors were most relevant to her group of students and proactively plan lessons in a way to minimize classroom anxiety. The mode scores of items 2, 3, 7 and 10 suggest that, contrary to the literature, the teacher would not have to worry about student anxiety about making mistakes, being randomly called on, volunteering an answer, or speaking in front of the entire class. The researcher noted anxiety factors that seemed to be of most concern to students: getting nervous when they don't understand the teacher (item 4) and worrying others will not understand their

English (items 8 and 17). Basic teaching strategies of repeating information and comprehension checks were used throughout the class. Students were explicitly told to speak up immediately when they did not understand something, or to stay after class and talk to the teacher in private if they felt more comfortable. After the basic course overview, students brainstormed an extensive list of possible weekly topics and then voted on the four best topics for a quality panel discussion. The rest of the class was dedicated to preparation for the first discussion class.

In the first panel discussion class, most students remained actively engaged with panelists, but three students were mostly silent. After the panelists left the classroom, the initial student reflections (see Appendix A) were distributed. Students wrote that the panelists were kind and patient because they waited whenever students used dictionaries. The researcher's observation of the quiet students was supported in one of the student's reflections which mentioned she disliked the "silence". One of the quiet students explained her reason for silence, "I don't like that I couldn't think of the new question."

Cycle two

An extra reading activity was conducted the following Tuesday to give students more background knowledge in the chosen topic and generate more discussion questions. Each of the three quiet students was assigned to a group of peers who had proven to be talkative in the previous session. The teacher's intent was to have the peers serve as language models and also to prevent the entire discussion from going quiet. The teacher gave a brief lecture on follow-up questions and modeled how they could be used. Lastly, the reflection handouts were revised so that questions were phrased in a way that encouraged more detailed responses (see Appendix B).

The arrangement of student groups produced both positive and negative results.

During Tuesday preparation, one of the quiet students, now in a group with her cousin, participated more in group work. However, the other two quiet students wrote questions on their own paper without communicating with their group members. On Thursday, all three quiet students sat and listened quietly unless directly addressed by the panelists. However, the follow-up question training was determined to be useful in that many group members could be heard extending their conversation with follow-up questions.

The revised student reflection produced more details and a greater volume of feedback. Two students commented on how they could talk longer in this discussion, as one student wrote, “I spoke much longer than before’s class. I like it.” The students also seemed to be calmed by the panelists. Four students mentioned an older gentleman who was particularly kind. One student wrote, “I felt calm because [he] spoke very slowly for us. It made me relax so much.” Another student commented, “Every panelists are very kind and their answer is easy to understand.” One reoccurring problem was silence. Students also began to complain about classmates, although they did not mention names. One student wrote, “I don’t like a student who didn’t ask them a question, keep quiet. I didn’t know how to make her speak more.” When reassigning group members, the researcher had assumed that the more talkative students would enjoy the extra opportunity to speak, but the reflections implied that the silence of their peers may have been a burden. The same student who complained about a classmate, also mentioned being nervous when she, herself, could not think of questions to ask. Another student mentioned feeling nervous when she could not understand what the panelist said.

Students’ perceptions of their own English ability was a reoccurring theme in this cycle. One student mentioned that she got insecure, “when we run out our questions.” Another student wrote, “I felt insecure not having my English ability.”

Despite these insecurities, the panelists served in some ways to build the students' confidence. One student wrote, "I could ask many questions which I thought previously, and they understood my questions and answered." Another student commented, "Every paneler understood to us when I couldn't speak well." The initial Likert Scale questionnaire indicated the students' concerns with not being understood by their listeners. However, based on the data from student reflections in this cycle, they may have overestimated the importance accuracy plays in being understood.

Cycle three

By week three, the teacher had a better understanding of which students had a close rapport in and out of the classroom. Students were grouped with their friends in week three in order to increase support from group members, as well as the willingness of struggling students to ask for help. Basic clarifying and confirming expressions were reviewed, and students were also explicitly told to ask panelists to repeat words or speak slower if they had trouble understanding.

Although quiet students did seem to be smiling more with their friends, their participation did not increase. Students were not observed to be using any clarifying or confirming, but one more talkative student did directly ask a panelist to speak more slowly. There was also an unexpected additional panelist in the classroom due to a miscommunication. Rather than impede the conversation, his presence prompted longer conversations because students had not had the chance to pre-read his autobiography. They were able to come up with new questions spontaneously about things they wanted to know about him. The fact that the panelist was a Japanese man was additionally beneficial as the researcher noted in the journal, "the one male student, who originally had no male panelist to talk about the topic of

dating, appeared thrilled that a last-minute male panelist had arrived, even more so because he was a young Japanese man” (Personal Journal, Week 3, Entry 3).

The topic of dating may have been more interesting to students as was evidenced by the fact that the researcher, “attempted to stop each discussion after 15 minutes... [but the students] all asked to have 20 minutes” (Personal Journal Week 3, Entry 3). This third week seemed to be the liveliest panel discussion for both panelists and students, based on laughter, smiles, and less silence in comparison to other sessions. More than half the students left no comment or wrote “nothing” for what they disliked about the class. However, two students reported that they were embarrassed about sharing personal information, but, as one student wrote, “I enjoyed listening.” This comment provides evidence that even if a topic is interesting to students, it may not foster oral communication if the speaker is uncomfortable talking about it. Students’ comments about their inability to express themselves in English, “I have opinions, but I can’t express it very well,” and “I couldn’t speak enough time,” were the most common responses for things they disliked. This same inability also made students nervous, as did not being able to understand the panelist’s story, and, once again, silence.

Comments in the student reflections also showed that students were helping their friends communicate, “sometimes my friend helped me for my opinion,” and “when I couldn’t understand, friends taught to me.” Lastly, the reflections confirmed that the male student was relieved to have a Japanese man as a panelist, as he wrote, “when I hear, ‘Japanese man will come,’ this news made me calm.” The bonds that were being built both among students and between students and panelists appeared to reduce anxiety and foster communication. However, complaints of a group member’s performance, such as “I was worried because my partners didn’t prepare enough,” continued to appear in the third week. This remark was made by

a new student, meaning that more students were becoming frustrated with their less talkative peers.

Cycle four

Three major changes were made for the final cycle: A final reflection handout was designed, focusing on the entire course (see Appendix C), students were given freedom to ask about any interesting topic in addition to the topic of the day, and groups were arranged based on general discussion ability as determined by language performance in previous weeks; the quietest students were all put into one group to receive extra assistance from the teacher.

During the question formulation session on Tuesday, the quiet group received extra support from the teacher and was also given an additional activity to aid in formulating follow-up questions. The teacher repeated several times to the class that perfect grammar was not essential for communication with the panelists and also demonstrated how to use gestures and drawings, rather than just the dictionary, to aid in communication. Skills covered in previous preparation sessions were reviewed and the class ended with a mock practice discussion session.

On Thursday, the teacher monitored all groups, but again paid special attention to the quiet group. The teacher eventually decided to join the discussion with the quiet group. Overall, students were observed to be using more follow-up questions and other communication strategies; one quiet student asked a follow-up question about, “why the panelist went to Guatemala over the summer and how long he had been studying Spanish” (Personal Journal, Week 4, Entry 2). Another student interrupted a panelist and asked for clarification and the male student used the phrase, “I’m sorry, could you say that again please.” The quiet group was still the quietest of all groups, but all students continued to improve from the previous sessions.

Student reflections. The final course reflection was distributed to students at the end of the Thursday class. Responses were grouped into five categories for analysis: (1) things liked best/least about the class, (2) the easiest and hardest things about the class, (3) how the teacher made students feel (4) how their classmates made them feel, and (5) how the panelists made them feel.

Things liked best/least. As noted by the researcher in cycle three, “dating culture” was the most popular topic. Four students mentioned that this particular discussion was their favorite experience in the course. As the third cycle had the greatest oral participation from students, these comments may support the idea that interesting topics reduce anxiety and foster student participation (Young, 1990; Dörnyei, 1991). Students still mentioned disliking silence and, “an atmosphere that there are no questions for panelists.” It was not clear if these students felt the issue improved over the course of the four weeks.

Easiest/hardest things. One student wrote that “dating culture” was the easiest discussion in the class, further suggesting that the topic content affects their ability to communicate. Students also wrote that it was easier to answer questions than to ask them. “Making questions” was the hardest thing for most students. Two students mentioned their partner’s perceived reticence as the hardest thing in class, “In my group, people become quiet, so I try to make no boring. It’s hard,” and “My partner don’t speak with panelist.” They also mentioned that “fast speaking” was difficult to understand.

Teacher. The students all evaluated the teacher to be kind, friendly, and easy to understand, by writing, “[The teacher] is very friendly and kind to teaching, so I was calm,” “Your English was easy to understand. And you smile,” and “I could understand *your* English better.” All these statements support the comments on rapport from the literature. The quiet students also referenced the extra help they

received in the final week, "I felt confident when you joined our conversation," and "I was confident that 'my question is good question' you said." There was only one negative remark, related to the teacher's way of preparing questions in class; one student wrote, "I wanted to learn about each other question before ask panelists." In retrospect, it may have been better to make the final reflections anonymous since students may not have felt comfortable giving critical feedback about their teacher. However, the single comment did provide the teacher with an idea for improvement.

Classmates. There were also numerous comments about classmate support and rapport. One student wrote about teamwork, "Some people helped me. I helped them. We are good partner." Two other students wrote about receiving support, "They helped when I didn't know how to say the words," and "when I didn't know what should I say, they helped me," and a final student shared how she gained confidence assisting others, "when my friends depended on me while they were speaking. I felt confident." As rapport among students was not mentioned much in earlier reflections, the researcher believes students developed stronger bonds as the course progressed and became more willing and able to help each other.

There were also negative aspects to group dynamics. Four students mentioned how they got nervous when their group members did not prepare questions or speak during discussions. While these students thought their reticent classmates lacked preparation, the three quiet students explained the reasons behind their silence, "I was requested by my classmates, but I had no idea," "when my classmates could speak a lot of thing but I couldn't speak much time for panelist. It made me nervous," and "Sometimes nervous when I couldn't understand only me." These comments suggest that although the teacher was making no overt comparisons of students' language ability (Dörnyei 2001), the quiet students were comparing themselves to their more proficient peers.

Panelists. The students found all the panelists to be friendly, interesting, and kind. They had a calm feeling with most panelists but had anxiety in two circumstances: panelists sometimes talked too fast for the students to understand, while at other times, the panelists used words that were too difficult. Difficulty understanding the panelists was not limited to the quieter students, as the more talkative students were observed asking for clarification or for a panelist to repeat something they did not understand. The quiet students, however, were less likely to interrupt and use such communication strategies to assist their comprehension.

Further Discussion

A review of the student reflections over the four week cycle and the initial questionnaire results shows the anxiety factors that most commonly occurred were *difficulty understanding*, *inability to express oneself*, and *coping with silence*. Thus, many of the researcher's student's anxieties match Williams and Andrade's (2008) top four causes of classroom anxiety. Student reflections from all four cycles also echoed the claims of Horwitz et al. (1986), in that they sometimes felt they could not speak or did not know how to say something accurately, and that they had trouble understanding others and being understood themselves. Students did, however, come to realize that panelists could understand them even if their language was not perfect.

While all students may feel calmer with a kind and friendly teacher, and quieter students may have felt more comfortable in a group of friends, the group restructuring did little to enhance the discussion for quiet students, because, as indicated during observation and in student reflections, the core issue was most likely the students' language inability rather than their anxiety. Yet, a new question arises: *If all students were around the same language level what was it that made some*

students more effective at communicating with panelists? When looking back on the actions taken in each cycle, this researcher now believes more emphasis should have been placed on communicative competence (Canale, 1983), rather than the teacher's demeanor or group dynamics. A future study, focusing mainly on ways to determine students' pre-existing communicative competence, as well as training students to use communication strategies such as circumlocution, clarifying and confirming, active listening, follow-up questions, or how to ask for assistance from interlocutors, would perhaps produce more positive results in enhancing students' oral communication.

Conclusion

A language teacher's ultimate goal should be to prepare students who can communicate effectively both within and outside of the classroom by arming them with tools to repair communication breakdown even when a teacher is not present. Within the context of the present study, while reducing anxiety may have provided a safe and comfortable environment for student's to express themselves within the boundaries of their language ability, it was ineffective in cases where the real issue was a student's inability to communicate. Communication strategy training may offer a more long term and versatile solution.

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Appendix A

Week 1 - Student Reflection Handout

Name:

Date:

Think carefully about your experiences in class this week. Then, answer the questions below. Please be as honest and detailed as possible. Your opinions will not affect your grade.

- 1. What did you like about today's panel discussion?*

- 2. What didn't you like about today's panel discussion?*

- 3. How did you feel about speaking with today's panelists?*

- 4. Was there anything that made you nervous about speaking today?*

- 5. Was there anything about today's class that made you feel calm?*

- 6. Was there anything about today's class that made you feel confident about speaking?*

Appendix B

Weeks 2-3 (Revised) Student Reflection Handout

Name:

Date:

Think carefully about your experiences in class this week. Then, answer the questions below. Please be as honest and detailed as possible. Your opinions will not affect your grade.

1. *What did you like about today's lesson?*

2. *What didn't you like about today's lesson?*

3. *What made you nervous about today's lesson?*

4. *What made you feel calm about today's lesson?*

5. *What made you feel insecure about today's lesson?*

6. *What made you feel confident about today's lesson?*

Any other comments:

Appendix C

Week 4 - Student Reflection Handout

Name:

Date:

Think carefully about your experiences in class from week 1 - now. Then, answer the questions below. Please be as honest and detailed as possible. Your opinions will not affect your grade.

- 1) *What did you like best about this class?*
- 2) *What did you like least about this class.*
- 3) *What was the hardest thing about this class?*
- 4) *Was there anything about Danielle's teaching that made you feel confident or calm?*
- 5) *Was there anything about Danielle's teaching that made you feel insecure or nervous?*
- 6) *Was there anything about your classmates that made you feel confident or calm?*
- 7) *Was there anything about your classmates that made you feel insecure or nervous?*
- 8) *Was there anything about the visiting panelists that made you feel confident or calm?*
- 9) *Was there anything about the visiting panelists that made you feel insecure or nervous?*

Any other suggestions: