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Professor Neustupný: A student's perspective

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I was asked to talk about Professor Neustupný from a student's perspective, as I was fortunate to have been able to learn from him during his last years teaching in Japan. Although I didn't fully appreciate it at the time (particularly when deadlines were approaching), I was very lucky to have been taught by such an inspiring and passionate researcher. If I had never met Professor Neustupný, I know I wouldn't be where I am today, so I will always be grateful for him for giving me the chance to study at Chiba University and for always pushing me to try to aim that little bit higher.

If I hadn't been taught by Professor Neustupný, I may never have started my love affair with Language Management Theory and be here in Prague today presenting my research at an international symposium such as this. I remember my very first visit to his office hours, when I explained some of the issues I was interested in. His reply was short and simple; "You should use Language Management!", and from that day onward he had me hooked. I've spent the past sixteen years happily engrossed in norms, deviations, evaluations and adjustments, but being Professor Neustupný's student wasn't always easy. Although very encouraging, he could be very strict, particularly regarding my use of Japanese (which is admittedly still rather dodgy). I remember a number of occasions when I was called out into the corridor after class and had my Japanese corrected. Although this was pretty nerve-racking at times, on the positive side, it meant that by experiencing being managed, I wasn't just learning about the Language Management process, such as other-noting other-adjustment, I was actually living it ☺. I am now in a position to more fully appreciate the value of being 'corrected'. Especially for language learners, where correction occurs very rarely in daily life, if your teacher isn't going to correct you, who on earth is?

From being Professor Neustupný's student, I also learned a lot of good teaching practices that have helped me in my teaching career. Here are my favourite three:

1) Make your students know that your time is valuable.

I learnt very early on that an office hour session with Professor Neustupný could never last more than 20 minutes. As the time approached we would often be gently nudged

towards the door with the words 'Oh I think I can hear the next person outside'. It's only now that I appreciate how our time for research is so limited and can so easily get eaten up by our students.

2) Your students are unlikely to do their best if you don't push them.

At meetings with Professor Neustupný, there was always a pile of reading homework waiting at the edge of his desk and the often dreaded, 'Have you got that draft/report/outline/contents page, etc. for me yet?' On the other hand, his well-directed nudges enabled me to write and publish my very first papers, something that at that time I probably would not have been able to achieve if left to my own devices.

3) Don't assume that you know everything but learn from your students.

I was often surprised at how such a renowned scholar as Professor Neustupný would really listen to his students and be open to criticism. I remember many times that he would write down interesting points during student discussions and very openly admit that he hadn't thought about a certain point before. This was really motivating for me as a student because I always felt I was being included in the knowledge-creating process, rather than being just outside observer, even if it meant that sometimes I was called a 'heretic'.

But perhaps the most important lesson I learnt from Professor Neustupný came from a speech he made at his farewell party before leaving Japan to go back to Australia. The message I took home with me that night was 'don't be afraid *not* to be mainstream'. He told us how he had benefitted greatly in his career by not being a central figure in the mainstream trends in linguistics, particularly those emanating from North America. Working outside the biases of the central journals had enabled him a considerable amount of freedom to pursue unhampered the issues that he had felt to be the most important, but which other researchers were paying little attention to at the time. Indeed, being on the fringes granted him the freedom to test out new ideas without the constraints of other disciplines and their preferences for particular methods and presentation styles.

To be honest, when I first started working at my current institution with professors with very different methodological and theoretical approaches to language, I felt very nervous about doing something different and I was very conscious that the work I was doing was not mainstream in their eyes. However, Neustupný's words have stayed with me and thanks to the growing strength of our international community, I can now more

fully appreciate the advantages of having a different approach. It's thanks to Professor Neustupný's courage to work outside the mainstream that has enabled us to develop this great research community. For this we must surely all be grateful.