

# **Building a Learning Community by Transforming the Learning Space**

Clair Taylor

**Gifu Shotoku Gakuen University**

I used to teach at Toyo Gakuen University. I was involved in several research projects in the English Lounge there, including one in which my co-researcher Sarah Birchley and I created some recommendations for the design of conversation lounges.



- Make the space status-free
- Use natural light where possible, and where lighting is used, use full-spectrum
- Use soft lighting
- Avoid venetian blinds
- Keep the room well ventilated
- Add enticing smells
- Maintain a comfortable, warm ambient temperature
- Use warm colors for walls and furnishings
- Avoid any use of red, even in small amounts
- Use furniture with rounded corners
- Carpets are a good idea, but avoid strongly patterned carpets
- Aim for a sense of order and avoid clutter
- Include plants, views of nature from the windows, or pictures of natural landscapes
- Use soft seating but avoid sofas

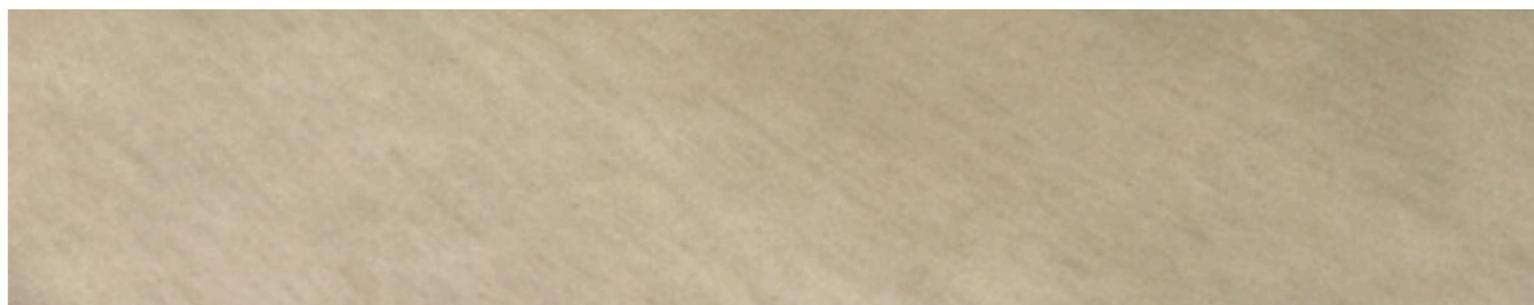
Recommendations for the design of conversation lounges, Taylor & Birchley, 2011

I recently started teaching at Gifu Shotoku Gakuen University.





The conversation lounge at Gifu Shotoku Gakuen University was hardly being used. It looked like a classroom.



# Action Research

Interviews, photos, observation

Consultation

Usage log

**Intervention**

Design (English as the working language)

Usage log

Interviews

I embarked on an Action Research project to address this problem.



Students were interviewed about the places they like to go to talk to their friends, on and off campus. The factors below were mentioned by several students.

Open

Eating, drinking

Private

Comfort

Sofa, you can put your feet up

Coffee

Staff make you feel welcome

Beauty/ art/ pets

Lively, bustling, there are different people

This is the new design. The budget was limited, but we were able to buy new sofa chairs, plants, posters, beanbags, rugs, tables, and shelving units.



Although 'institutional' and classroom-like, the students were keen to keep the blackboard. It was extensively used, as you can see in this example of crowd sourcing.

rack  
lack

我想去中国。  
我想话汉语和中国朋友。  
我昨年三个四川吃了在北京。

I started to learn  
Chinese little bit before  
Please correct  
these sentences!!

The student's appeal for help was successful.

hū 我和中国朋友  
一起去吃饭 rack  
lack 四川 蝎子  
台湾  
我想去中国 反对  
我想 ~~学~~ 汉语 和中国朋友 一起 聊天儿  
我 昨天 三个 四川 吃了 (在北京) - swe  
去

I started to learn  
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Please correct  
these sentences!!



Various inspiring thoughts, questions, answers, in-jokes, song lyrics, pictures, and other doodles appear on the board.

You should be the 瓶

Change that you  
want to see in the world.

あなたがこの世界に望む change  
変化にあなた自身が跟いなさいのか？

东 两杯  
五并  
和は [ ] で  
① 左 [ ] 場所

ter this he hu 我和中国朋友 rack  
一起去吃饭 lack



If you'd like a hot drink, help yourself.



请大家自取热饮

Please put 50 yen in the donation box and wash your cup afterwards.

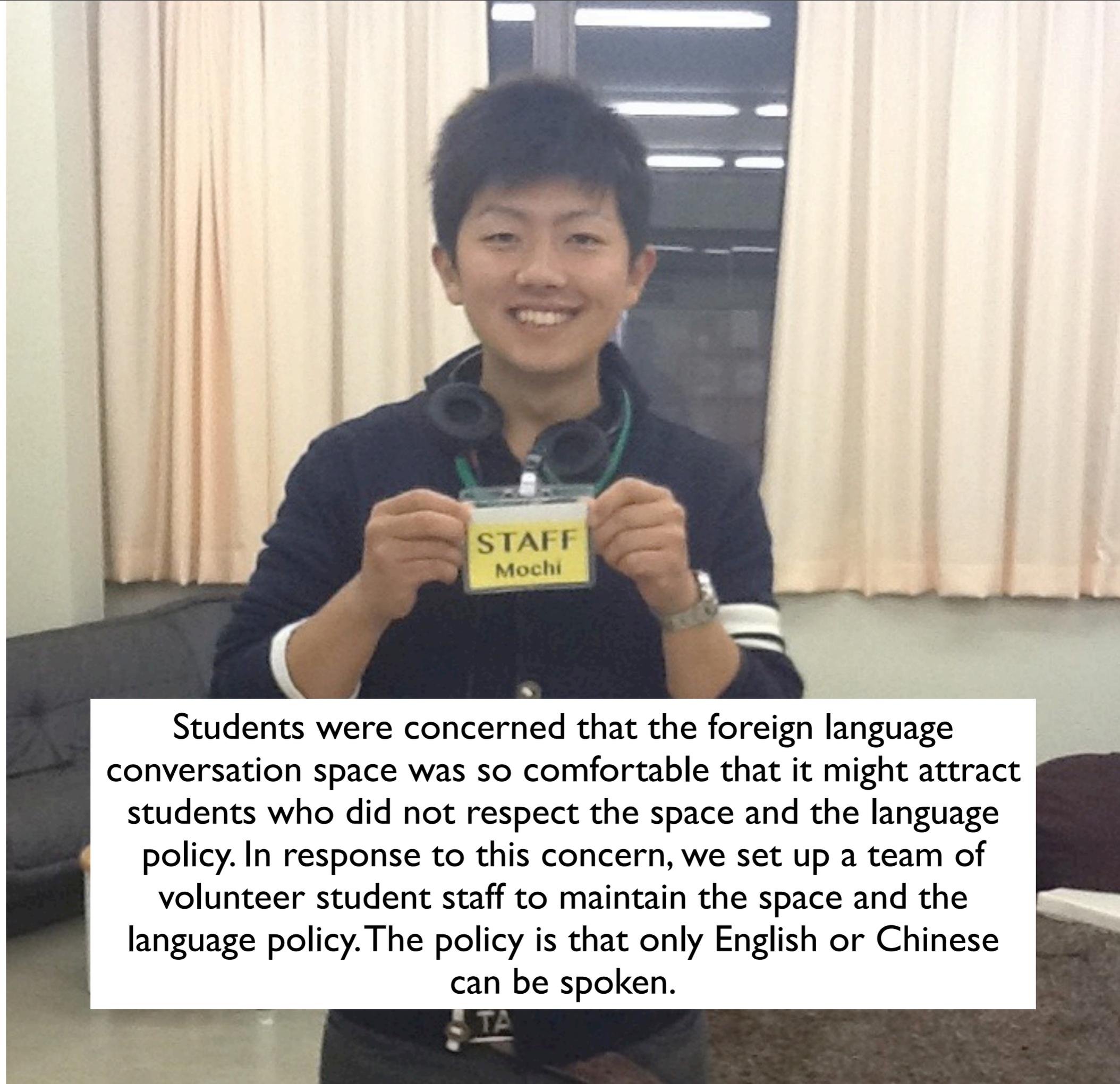
请放50円于捐款箱中并把杯子清洗干净



Make yourself

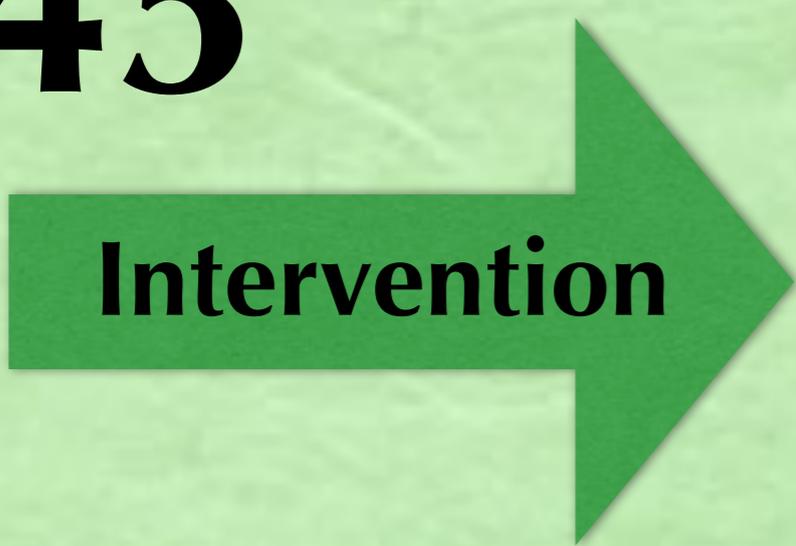
Coffee is one way to attract students and faculty to the lounge..





Students were concerned that the foreign language conversation space was so comfortable that it might attract students who did not respect the space and the language policy. In response to this concern, we set up a team of volunteer student staff to maintain the space and the language policy. The policy is that only English or Chinese can be spoken.

# 1.45



**Intervention**

The number of students using the space increased dramatically from an average of 1.45 students per day to over 16 per day. It is likely that the actual number is higher than the number recorded in the log, due to some students failing to record their visits.

# 1.45

# 16.45



**Intervention**

month 1

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**1.45**

**Intervention**

**16.45**

**month 1**

**16.35**

**month 2**

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Like a home!



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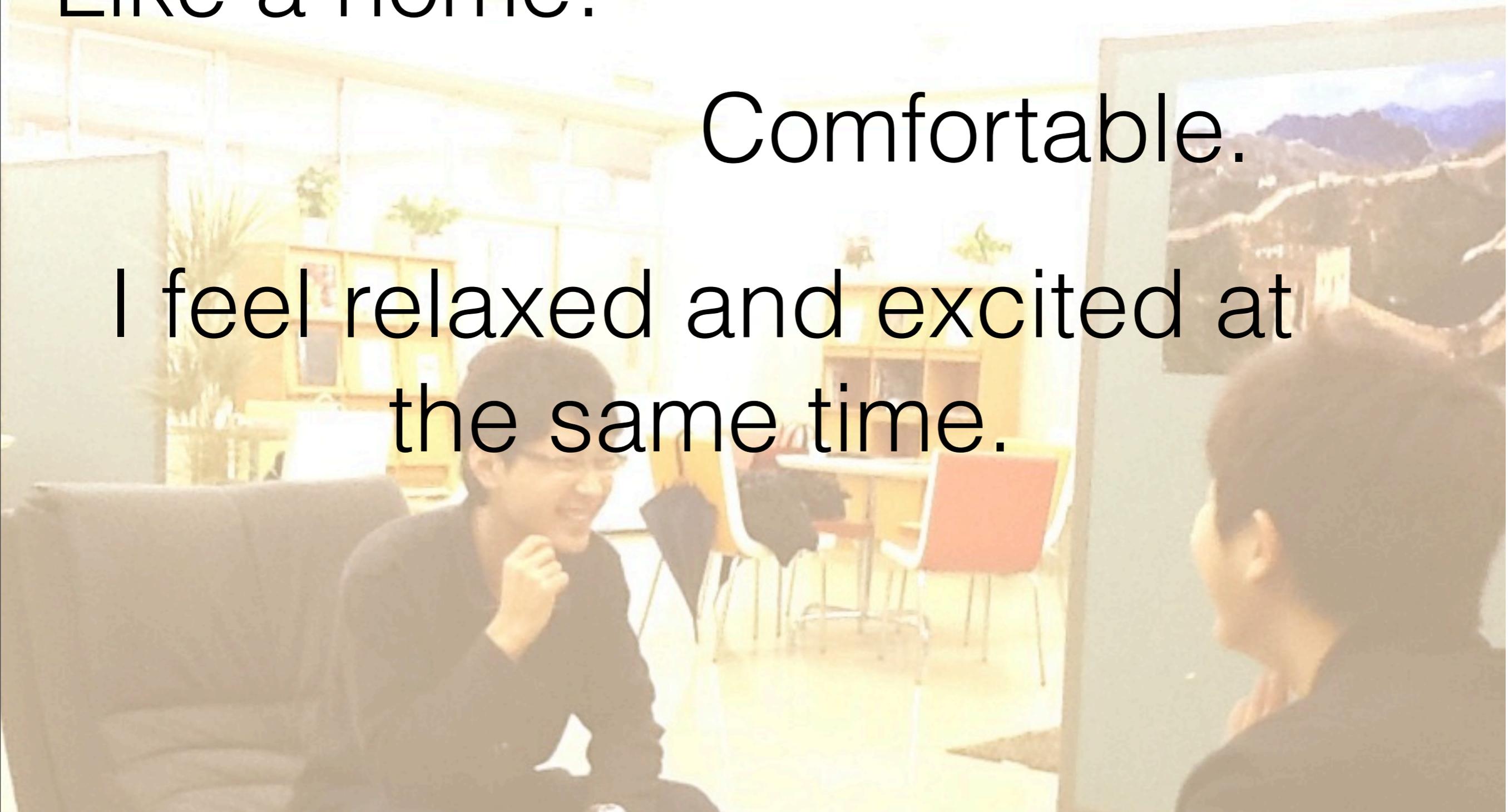


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I feel relaxed and excited at the same time.



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Like a home!

Comfortable.

I feel relaxed and excited at the same time.

Great couches and chairs.

Students began holding events in the space.



However, when they were asked about their use of Japanese in the lounge when teachers were not present, the answers were disappointing. Students spoke Japanese much of the time, and the Volunteer Staff did nothing to stop it. Language policy and staff training and development need to be the focus on the next cycle of action research.

I spoke Japanese  
20% of the time



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We are scared to warn them,  
to tell them.

# [tinyurl.com/Taylor-Lounge](http://tinyurl.com/Taylor-Lounge)

You can download a handout at the link above, and feel free to email me with any questions or suggestions.

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