**Video 12 Learning as Discovery—Dismounted**

**Interactions** (0:01 to 2:45)

**Tim:** This word, do you know what it means?

(Points to *dismounted.*)

**Wakako**: (Shakes head “no”.)

**Tim:** No, OK.

Is it an action or a thing?

**Wakako**: A thing.

**Tim:** A thing.

How do you know that?

**Wakako**: (Giggles)

From him. (Point to another student.)

**Wakako** and **Tim**: (Laugh.)

**Tim**: Read the line aloud with gestures.

**Wakako**: The three men/ dismounted from their house/

As soon as they arrived at the fisherman?

**Visiting teacher:** Dismounted from their . . .

**Wakako:** Their house?

**Visiting teacher**: Is it an animal or a place?

**Wakako:** Place?

**Visiting teacher**: H

**Wakako:** House

**Visiting teacher:** O, R. . .

**Wakako**: Horse! 1:10

Ah!!! OK. The three men dismounted from

their horse as soon as they arrived at the

fisherman’s house.

**Visiting teacher:** Draw dismounted.

Draw a picture of dismounted.

**Wakako**: Huh? I have no idea.

**Visiting teacher:** Draw the horse.

**Wakako**: (Draws a horse.)

**Visiting teacher:** Stand up and say the line. 1:46

**Wakako:** The three men/dismounted from their horse/

as soon as they arrived/at the fisherman’s house.

**Visiting teacher**: Gesture *dismounted. Dismounted.*

**Wakako**: I have no idea.

**Visiting teacher:** Yes you do. 2:05

**Wakako**: Hum.

**Visiting teacher:** You have an idea.

**Wakako:** (Laughs.)

**Visiting teacher:** You’re on a horse.

**Wakako:** Huh?

**Visiting teacher**: You’re sitting on a horse.

**Wakako**: Ahh!! Got it!

(Holds up arms as if she is holding reins.)

**Visiting teacher:** And after that what happens?

**Wakako:** Stop.

**Visiting teacher**: *Stop* and?

**Wakako**; And. . . . . (Gestures get off) get off.

Um. . . so *get off from the horse* is

*dismounted.* Ah!! OK! 2:45

**My Reflections** (2: 46 to 10:33)

**John:** One of the commonest directions that teachers do when students read a new passage is to underline the words they don’t

Understand. You can see in this student’s paper (below) that instead of underlining it the student made an indication of the word that he didn’t understand with a, his pencil. Now I tell the students sometimes to cross out the word they don’t understand. But then if they cross it out and then later they figure out what the meaning is, they forget what the word is. So you can put a post it on. That’s another option and you can take the post it off. But this student indicated these are two words I have trouble with. Put an x through it and then put that little grey line on top. That grey bar on top.

So then you see when the students look around at the other words they do know. There’re able to usually discover the word they don’t know. 3:49

Two words crossed out in this passage.

***A short trip in 1800***

The three men ~~dismounted~~ from their horses as soon as they arrived at the fisherman’s house. After they took the saddles off of their horses and tied their *reins* to a tree, the fisherman’s son gave water and food to the horses.

The three men umm, they know it’s an action. If they focus only on *dismounted*, they can’t figure it out. They have to look at the words around the words they don’t know not at the words they don’t know.

Looking at the words they don’t know instead of the words they do know is what Wakako has been taught all of her life and what most students around the world are taught. Look at what you don’t know. It’s called *tunnel vision.* 4:20

You see looking at the end of this tunnel.

(Photo of a tunnel with a mountain at the end on the screen.)

You have no idea of what is around. I mean it could be a rock. But you don’t know what’s beneath the rock. You don’t know if there are trees around. You see a very, very small part of the landscape.

And then as you get out of the tunnel, you can put this thing you see now in a wider perspective. You can look to the right, you can look to the left, you can look up, you can look down. And that’s what learners have to do with a reading passage. They have to look up, down, left and right because words are related not only within each individual sentence but between sentences. So “they took the saddles off of their horses” is the next sentence. So if you keep reading, say, wait a minute, they took something off of their horses. What were they? And then, oh, maybe there was a seat.

“They tied their reins to a tree.” Oh, then they go back again so then if they took something off the horse they were sitting on maybe this word that I don’t know means they got off. Just like they took off, they got off. So you have to look up down, left and right in order to discover and understand meaning. So focusing on individual words you don’t know is very detrimental to language development.

Many teachers resist making video clips because 5:47

they say I don’t want my students to feel uncomfortable and if I put a video camera in the classroom and point it towards the students they’ re not going to act naturally. Now in this world of selfies and cellphones where students are taking videos of themselves right left and center I think it’s a different time then it used to be. So I’m just curious as you look at this picture it reminds you of how Wakako was acting. Do you think she acted in an inhibited way, a very kind of frozen way, kind of stiff way or do you think she acted very naturally and in a very uninhibited way?

And I have to point out that in addition to the video 6:37

person who was making the video clip and the teacher there were three other teachers in the room. Wakako was so engaged in trying to make this discovery that she totally ignored us.

When I ask people who look at this video clip of Wakako

discovering the meaning of *dismounted*, and ask them for their comments, at least a few teaches and sometimes more than a few teachers, say, “We wonder why the teacher is wasting the student’s time.” It took two and one half minutes for Wakako to

discover this word. If she used a bilingual dictionary she could have gotten the meaning in a heartbeat. Or, alternatively, the teacher could have demonstrated it very quickly. And of course the student could look it up in a monolingual dictionary or the teacher could define the word.

Well, here’s what it looks like in a monolingual 7:36

dictionary: [Click the enlarge icon and you will be able read the print on the screen.]

**Dismount**

1. [no obj.] alight from a horse, bicycle or other thing that one is riding

You notice at the top of the page that it’s *dismount,* not *dismounted* so that’s one problem if the student looks this up maybe slightly in the future the student might say *dismount* rather than *dismounted*. It’s unlikely that any of the students will understand the meaning of a l i g h t.

Then if you go down to the thesaurus which is another way to look up words it says in number 2 He was already dismounted: and then it says *unseat, dislodge, throw, unhorse* which are all in the present tense. *Dismounted* is in the past tense.

So there’s a lot of information here. So I talk about 8:15

how to teach students how to access this information and make use of bilingual dictionaries, in 4.6 *The best place to hide a secret.* But if the people who are paid to write definitions come up with this it’s unlikely teachers could come up with clearer definitions spontaneously as they’re talking in class.

This book is not about teaching as showing and 8:40

telling. It’s the exact opposite of that in fact. See, Wakako took two and one half minutes but she was learning ways to learn. She was beginning to notice relationships between words which she hadn’t noticed before. She was beginning to match her experience with the language. She was puzzling things out.

Out job is not just to give information, show and tell, but

It’s to show ways to learn. As Plato said, remind people of what they already know.

Montessori tells an anecdote about a visit to 9:25

Central Park in New York City. And she observed parents with their children. And the children would fill a bucket with sand and then they would dump it out and then they would fill it again and dump it out. And then sometimes the parents would say, “Oh, John, it’s time to go home and they would start helping the child fill the bucket. And the children usually got very angry and started crying and shouting. And Montessori said, “Let them fill their own buckets.”

So Plato said teaching is reminding people of what they already know. And Montessori said let them fill their own buckets.

These are themes of the book. Our task is to give clues, to develop self-reliance and tap students’ natural ability to discover. When she kept saying, “I have no idea,” she had been taught *learned helplessness.* We want to not teach *learned helplessness*. We want to teach how much people can do that is much more than they think they can do.

**PS** After we finished the video clip, Wakako and I started to chat and somehow we started discussing places we had visited. I mentioned that I had lived in New Zealand for 8 years. She said she had done a home stay there on a farm. And one of the activities she had done for the first time was to ride horses.

So in the event, she had dismounted from horses, held reins and sat on saddles many times. But to get on and off a horse and hold reins and sit on a saddle we do not have to know the language that represents these actions.

If we teach language for its own sake, to prepare for exams rather than to use it to express personal feelings and information and to learn about the world and the feelings of others, we will produce learners like Wakako who was not in the habit of connecting language she was asked to read with her personal experiences.

“The material of the language lesson is not language, but life itself; the language is the instrument we use to deal with the material, slices of experience.” (F. L. Billows, *The Techniques of Language Teaching.* Longman, 1961) Had Wakako had teachers who Billows had taught, I would predict that Wakako predict that she would have not taken two and one half minutes to predict the meaning of *dismounted.* Not that predicting is a speed contest. Only that learning how to learn enables us to learn a great deal more in the same amount of time

1847 Words