

Action Research Final Report 2010-11

Open Ended Conversations in the 1st Year of Jr. Middle School

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- 1) **Class information**
 - a) **Level:** Middle School 1st year.
 - b) **Class size:** 2 Action Research and 7 other classes that did most of the same activities, all with 35 students each
 - c) **Text:** New Horizon 1.
 - d) **The Problem:** The standard approach to teaching the New Horizon course involves a mix of mechanical and meaningful drills and occasional communicative activities provided on special pages of the text and additional activities created by the ALT. This entirely output oriented approach is ineffective because there is with very little comprehensible input, so the students cannot acquire the language they will use in the communicative activities. Often we can scaffold a communicative activity with more mechanical and meaningful drills just before the activity. Then the students can do the activity well enough for it to function as input. However this does not work if the gap between what they need to know and what they know is too great. Also it tends to lead to very simple activities with very little contribution from the student. A better way of scaffolding communicative activities is needed.
- 2) **Goals:**
 - a) To scaffold open ended conversations using comprehensible input with focus on form, and learner invested materials.
 - b) For students to be able to talk for 2 minutes without a script.
- 3) **What I did:** Over the course of the 2nd and 3rd terms with the cooperation of the I did five open-ended activities. For the scaffolding the activities I utilized structured input and output drills or other activities with similar characteristics. Structured input and output drills are communicative drills that force the learner to attend to a specific structure to understand communication in the case of structured input, and to express there intended meaning in the case of structured output. Please refer to James F. Lee and Bill VanPatten's *Making Communicative Language Teaching Happen* 2nd Ed. (2003) for more information. In addition I used structured input and output to teach various grammar points throughout the term and to scaffold the Speaking Plus activities in the text.

With exception of the "What are they doing" composition lesson all the lessons utilized learner invested materials. The making of these materials serves as a time when students can process the language they will need for an upcoming output task. The materials also serve as a reference during the output task. The learner-invested material we used most was the conversation card. This is a card or paper on which the student writes words, phrases, questions, and draws pictures to serve as a reference during a conversation. They can be partially organized by the teacher in advance and completed by the student, or they can be completely created by the student. I utilized both types in these lessons.

Another characteristic of most of the lessons was the use of recursive-timed conversations. The recursive conversations have some interesting advantages. First the students learn from each other. Students who do not understand the activity learn from other students with whom they converse. In this way, with each iteration, more and more students understand the activity and are able to do it. The second utility is that students are immediately able to try what they learn in the first few iterations.

The first of these lessons went very well, but the second was less successful. One of the problems I suspected might be in play was that students were unclear what information they should be exchanging and what the point of the exercise was. Because of this I became interested

in information exchange tasks as described by Lee and VanPatten (2003). In an information exchange task students are told specifically a kind or kinds of information they should exchange and they are given something to do with that information such as writing a paragraph. In this way the students have a clear obtainable goal that guides them in their communication. It also guides the teacher's lesson planning. The authors suggest that the teacher identify sub goals that are needed to complete the task and organize lessons around teaching those goals in advance of the task. This is more or less how I was already approaching my lesson planning so it was a perfect fit. I started trying out the concept with the *I Can* lesson and for the final lesson I organized the lesson completely around the concept of the information exchange task.

Summaries of the five lessons with open-ended activities follow.

1. **I like/ I do:** 1minute timed conversations about participants' likes and dislikes and things that they play and do. Some structured input and output on the difference between play and do was provided and students made conversation cards.
2. **My Family:** 2 minute timed conversations about participants' family members' likes and dislikes. For form focused input and output several guessing games were played over two class sessions where students first listened to clues and then provided them and where students first listened to questions and then asked them. Conversation cards were made
3. **"What are they doing?":** Students wrote compositions about what the people in a picture where doing. Structured input and output was provided in previous class sessions on the present continuous and identifying people with prepositional phrases. These were combined in an input game for the first half of the class. Then students wrote compositions in groups.
4. **I can:** 2 minute timed conversations: Structured input was provided then students made conversation cards and did the conversations. Some students had time to write a little about what they learned from their partners.
5. **My Winter Holiday:** Information exchange task. (See accompanying lesson plan) Structured input and output on the past tense over the course of 3 class sessions. In the 4th class session students made conversation cards about their winter holiday and had 2 minute timed conversations with the goal of finding out what activities they had in common.

1) **Results:**

I collected two sources of data from the students to corroborate my in class observations these are a self-evaluation and a survey.

a) **The self-evaluations.**

The students did self-evaluations for the information exchange task at the end. Only three classes did the final activity so there are self-evaluations for three classes.

Question 1: Could you talk for two minutes 2分間話すことができた。

		2組	3組	8組	全部
5	I could probably talk longer. もっと長くはなせる	9.1%	3.4%	13.0%	8.1
4	I could talk for two minutes. できた	63.6%	48.3%	56.5%	55.4
3	I could not talk for two minutes 2分間話せなかった	9.1%	20.7%	21.7%	17.6
2	I could talk very little. あまり話せなかった。	9.1%	20.7%	4.3%	12.2
1	I could not talk at all. 全然話せなかった。	9.1%	6.9%	4.3%	6.8

	5+4	72.7	51.7	69.6	63.5
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Question 2: I could talk about what I did. 自分のしたことをはなせた。

		2組	3組	8組	全部
5	Many times. 何回も	32.0	9.4	35.7	24.7
4	A fair amount. 使った	40.0	46.9	32.1	40.0
3	I could a little. 少し	8.0	25.0	10.7	15.3
2	Very little あまり	12.0	15.6	17.9	15.3
1	No	8.0	3.1	3.6	4.7
	5+4	72.0	56.3	67.9	64.7

Question 3 I could ask questions about what my partner did.

会話の相手がしたことについて質問できた。

		2組	3組	8組	全部
5	Many times. 何回も	20.8	3.1	14.3	11.9
4	A fair amount. 使った	41.7	40.6	28.6	36.9
3	I could a little. 少し	20.8	21.9	25.0	22.6
2	Very little あまり	8.3	31.3	21.4	21.4
1	No	8.3	3.1	10.7	7.1
	5+4	62.5	43.8	42.9	48.8

Question 4: I could use “how about you.” “how about you?”を使うことができた。

		2組	3組	全部
5	Many times. 何回も	44.0	6.3	28.2
4	A fair amount. 使った	28.0	40.6	27.1
3	I could a little. 少し	8.0	25.0	15.3
2	Very little あまり	4.0	9.4	9.4
1	No	16.0	18.8	20.0
	5+4	72.0	46.9	55.3

(ア)Survey Results

Question 1: 英語が好きですか。

Question 2: 4月は、英語が好きでしたか

		Q1今	Q2 四月
5	とても好きだ。	15.6%	26.6%
4	好きだ	32.8%	18.8%
3	どちらでもない	37.5%	34.4%
2	あまり好きじゃない	7.8%	14.1%
1	好きじゃない	6.3%	6.3%

	5+4	48.4%	45.3%
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Reasons given for liking English or liking it more:

- 英語が少しはなせるようになった。(2)
- 英語で英語のドラマや映画を見てみたくなってがんばったから。(1)
- 塾で好きになった(1)
- あまり英語のことを知らなかった。変わった (1)
- 昔から好きだから。(1)
- 先生の教え方が楽しかったから。(1)
- 最初は全然分からなかったけどやってるうち楽しかった。
- 英語が分かるようになった
- 授業が楽しかったのでどんどん n 好きになった。
- 授業ツマンネそして二人のテンションについてけねえ

Reasons given for not liking English or liking it less

- 難しくなってきたから。(8)
- 四月にくらべて「過去形」や「現在進行形」なてかできむずかしくなったから。(1)

Question 3: 英語の授業が面白いですか。

Question 4: 4 月は、英語の授業が面白かったですか

		Q3今	Q4 四月
5	とても面白い	12.5%	23.4%
4	面白い	48.4%	34.4%
3	どちらでもない	28.1%	35.9%
2	あまり面白くなかった	4.7%	1.6%
1	面白くなかった	6.3%	4.7%
	5+4	60.9%	57.8%

Reasons given for English being interesting or more interesting:

- レクター先生がとてもおもしろい (3)
- 英語で話せるようになったから(2)
- 分かるようになったから。(2)
- じょう談が通じるから(1)

Reasons given for English not being interesting or less interesting:

- 押し付けがましくなった。(1)
- 先生が変わった。(1)
- 小テストがなくなった(1)
- 入学したばかりでこうきしん的なのがあった。(1)

Question 5: 2分間トークでは自分について英語で話すことができた。

Question 6 四月の時点で自分について英語で話すことができた。

Question 7 2分間トークでは相手のことについて英語で質問することができた。

Question 8 四月の時点で相手のことについて英語で質問することができた。

Question 9 2分間トークでは相手の質問を理解し、応えることができた。

Question 10 四月の時点で相手の質問を理解し、応えることができた。

		5 今	6 四月	7 今	8 四月	9 今	10 四月
5	自信をもってできた	23.8%	17.5%	19.4%	11.3%	25.4%	16.1%
4	まあまあできた	44.4%	31.7%	38.7%	33.9%	36.5%	30.6%
3	すこしできた	23.8%	30.2%	33.9%	30.6%	30.2%	37.1%
2	むずかしかった	3.2%	12.7%	6.5%	16.1%	4.8%	4.8%
1	全然できなかった	4.8%	7.9%	1.6%	8.1%	3.2%	11.3%
	5+4	68.3%	49.2%	58.1%	45.2%	61.9%	46.8%

Question 11 2分間トークでは二分間英語で話すことができた。

Question 12 四月の時点で二分間英語で話すことができた。

		11 今	12 四月
5	もっと長く話せるかもしれない	16.1%	9.5%
4	できた	43.5%	33.3%
3	2分間話せなかった	24.2%	33.3%
2	あまり話せなかった	11.3%	12.7%
1	全然話せなかった。	4.8%	11.1%
	5+4	59.7%	42.9%

Question 13 コミュニケーションゲームは、二分間トークを準備するのに役立った。

Question 14 コミュニケーションゲームは、文法を学ぶのに役立った。

Question 15 会話カードは二分間トークをするのに役立った。

Question 16 会話カードは二分間トークを準備するのに役立った。

		13	14	15	16
5	大変役立った	15.9%	19.0%	17.7%	17.5%
4	とても役立った	20.6%	22.2%	27.4%	25.4%
3	少し役立った	41.3%	42.9%	38.7%	38.1%
2	あまり役立たなかった	15.9%	11.1%	11.3%	12.7%
1	全然役立たなかった	6.3%	4.8%	4.8%	6.3%
	5+4	36.5%	41.3%	45.2%	42.9%

Question 17 コミュニケーションゲームを楽しめた。

Question 18 二分間トークを楽しめた。

		17	18
5	とても楽しかった	25.4%	19.0%
4	楽しかった	27.0%	28.6%
3	少し楽しかった。	33.3%	34.9%
2	あまり楽しくなかった	7.9%	11.1%

1	全然楽しくなかった	6.3%	6.3%
	5+4	52.4%	47.6%

Question 19 英語の授業で好きな活動は何ですか

1分間リーリング (12)

コミュニケーションゲーム (8)

ビデオ (7)

レクター先生との活動 (4)

トーク活動 (3)

Writing activities (3)

普通のユニットとかの授業(2)

Question 20

プリント (8)

英会話 (7)

1分間リーディング (6)

コミュニケーションゲーム(5)

単語練習 (2)

1) **What I learned**

a) **My Questions:** I has three questions I wanted to answer about these lessons.

i) **Are the students able to do the timed conversations?**

The answer to my first question is a qualified yes. During the lessons I observed that most of the students were able to do the conversations. Often they were appeared unsure of themselves the first time and gradually gained confidence. By the third or fourth iteration of the activity they were usually smiling and talking confidently in English. The self-evaluations and survey confirm my observation that a majority of the students 63.5% are able to meet the goals of the timed conversations, but some students in each class are able to do very little in these activities. In 1-3 as we can see from the self-evaluations about 26% either unable to participate or participate very little.

ii) **Are the various scaffolding activities and conversation cards effective?**

Based on what I observed in the class I believe the answer to this question is Yes. What I noticed was that when students did not do the scaffolding activities or make their conversation cards they struggled in the conversations. I noticed in particular several boys in class 1-3 who have difficulty concentrating on input activities. They often want to do the output activities but cannot do so. As failure to do the scaffolding activities is connected with failure in the timed conversation there may be a causal relationship. However it is possible that the students who succeeded in the timed conversations would have done so anyway. Corroboration is needed. The survey provides corroboration. 77.8 percent of students though that the communication activities were effective for preparing them for timed conversations, 81% thought preparing the conversation cards was effective.

iii) **Are the students who struggle with English being helped by these lessons?**

Unfortunately the answer to this question is no. While there are some students who seem to be reengaging there is no evidence that this reengagement is caused by these lessons. Clearly from the survey and self-evaluation results there is a group of students who are not able to do the activities. Also as I mentioned some students who have difficulty with paying attention to the structured input activities are not benefiting from them and

struggle with the output activities. Some other approach is needed to reach these students. Perhaps they would be helped by TPR.

b) Lessons about Procedures:

- i) It is important to make sure students fully understand the goals of timed conversations. I think there should be a self-evaluation for the students to complete in each timed conversation session. The items in the self-evaluation should be read in class to make sure the students know the goals.
- ii) Self-evaluations will also confirm classroom observations about the success of activities and how individual students are doing.
- iii) When working on their learner invested materials in class students generally communicate with the people near them. As a result they often have already exchanged the information with those people. It is important to move the students before starting the timed conversations and sometimes when doing structured output.
- iv) Writing tasks that must be done during or between conversations should be kept very simple so that students can do them without copying each other papers or stopping the flow of communication.

c) Lessons about the action research

- i) For following the progress of the students it is better to have them fill out self-evaluations each time. I don't think the students always interpret questions on surveys the way I do so I don't know how to interpret their answers. A self-evaluation where the student writes how they did this particular time is more clear than asking a student about it later.
- ii) My open ended questions on surveys need to be focused on the research questions. I gained no insight about the effectiveness of my scaffolding from my open-ended questions this time.
- iii) In order to get the student's opinions about activities the activities need to have names so that you can refer to them easily. As I never called the few conversation strategies I taught anything I could not refer to them in the survey. The same goes for the structured input and output. I started calling them communication drills at the very end but before that everything I did was just called a game by the JTEs. There was no way to distinguish between games and the structured input and output. Every recurring type of activity needs a name.

2) Future work:

- (1) The work I have done so far with this was not enough in my opinion. Too many students did not reach the goals. The following are some things I think will help. I will try incorporating them in my AR on information exchange tasks next year.
- ii) To get a positive wash back effect everything must be part of the student's evaluation and a communication test is needed in every term.
- iii) More structured input and output are needed. One of the guidelines of structured input and output is to move from sentences to discourse. I could not do this due to lack of time. The JTEs need to be doing the structured input in their classes rather than mechanical drills.
- iv) More work is needed on strategies. I would like to have the time to work on strategies as a warm up activity in every lesson. However there is no time. Again if the JTEs would do the structured input in their lessons I could do more.
- v) TPR; perhaps integrated with the structured input in some way. The kinesthetic kids really need it. Again I don't have enough time if the JTEs won't give up their mechanical drills.
- vi) Self-evaluations and a chance to comment on activities in every lesson or at least all the timed conversation lessons.

- vii) Finally more time is needed for practicing the timed conversations and follow-up activities.

Reference:

James F Lee and Bill VanPatten: (2003) *Making Communicative Language Teaching Happen*. 2nd Ed. New York, McGraw Hill

Lesson Plan: My Winter Holiday Information Exchange Task for 1年 Unit 11

1. Level: Middle School 1st year.
2. Class size: 30-40
3. Text: New Horizon 1 (not used in these activities.)
4. Goal: The goal was to find out what your classmates did during winter vacation that you also did. There were various sub goals and a total of 4 lessons were involved.
5. Sub Goals
 - a. Sub-goal 1: simple past regular verbs
 - b. Sub goal 2: “How about you?”
 - c. Sub goal 3: Past tense yes or no questions
 - d. Sub goal 4 negative past tense declarative
 - e. Sub goal 5: the past tense irregular verbs: went, came, had, got, saw.
 - f. Sub goal 6: vocabulary related to the New Years Holiday, and likely activities.
6. Materials: 1年 Unit 11 Communication drills 1 (See Sample), Unit 11 Communication drills 2 and Unit 11 Communication Drills 3 会話カード worksheet. Color prints of various pictures in the worksheets.
7. Lesson sequence.
 - a. **Session 1: Sub-goals 1 and 2 (Procedure for sample worksheet)**
 - i. Materials: 1年 Unit 11 Communication Drills 1
 - ii. Procedure:
 1. Activity A: Use gestures and drawings on the blackboard to make the sentences comprehensible. The students should select the word they hear and guess whether the sentence is true. Then check their guesses. Finally check their understanding of the grammar.
 2. Activity B: Students chose an appropriate adverb for the sentence by crossing out the one that is incorrect. Then they answer indicate if the sentence is true for them. Finally, they use the dialog to find out if the sentence is true for their neighbor.
 3. Activity C: Students write one sentence about an activity on the most recent Saturday. Then use it in the dialog and find out about 4 classmates’ activities.
 4. Activity D: Students write about their classmates’ activities.
 - b. Session 2: Sub goals 3, 4 and 6
 - i. Materials: 1年 Unit 11 Communication Drills 2.
 - ii. Procedures:
 1. Activity A: Read the questions using gestures and drawing pictures or English words to make them comprehensible. The students should chose the word their hear and select their answer.
 2. Activity B and C check grammar and vocabulary.
 3. Activity D: The students should write, “Do” or “Did,” in each box and then ask their partner the question.
 4. Activity E: Students read the sentence and select the one in each box that they think is true. Then they should ask the ALT in chorus if he did each thing. If they get three correct it is Bingo!
 5. Activity F: Students write one thing they did not do, and then use the dialog to find out about their classmates.
 6. Activity G: Write about classmates.

- c. Session 3: Mr. Rector's Winter Holiday
 - i. Sub goals 5 and 6
 - ii. Materials: 1年 Unit 11 communication drills 3
 - 1. Part 1A: Students listen to the ALT read the sentence and answer the question.
 - 2. Part 1B: Check vocabulary by connecting the dots.
 - 3. Part 2: Fill in the blanks and number the pictures in order 1-6.
 - 4. Part 3 Listen to the ALT and check answers for Part 2
 - 5. Part 4 Read the story and add information to the pictures.
 - 6. Part 5: In pairs or groups take turns retelling the story. Try not to look at the other page.
 - 7. Part 6: Write about your own winter holiday.
- d. **Session 4: The Information Exchange Task.**
 - i. Goal: Students will do 2 minute timed conversations and then write some simple statements about what winter holiday activities both they and their partners did. Students should talk about their holiday, ask questions, and use the "how about you?" strategy.
 - ii. Materials: 会話カード, Survey, timer.
 - iii. Procedure:
 - 1. Give the students about 5 minutes to make a list of things they did on their winter holiday on their conversation card.
 - 2. Read self-evaluation goals.
 - 3. Demonstrate a conversation.
 - 4. 4 iterations of timed conversation
 - 5. Students write about what they learned.

会話をしてみましょう。

A	Hi
B	Hi
A	I played video games. How about you.
B	I played basketball.
A	Bye
B	Bye

Name	

1D クラスの友達について文章で表現してみよう。段落形式で書こう。

Name _____ Class 1-____ No. _____

Name _____ Class 1- _____ No. _____

会話カード

二分間トークを行います。三人以上の人と、それぞれ二分間会話をします。会話をしたそれぞれの相手があなたと同じことをしたか確かめてみよう。

1. 会話前：プリントの裏に、あなたが今年の冬休みにしたことをいくつか英語で書きましょう。
2. 会話中：二分間話それぞれの会話の相手があなたと同じことをしたかどうか、印をつけていきましょう。
3. 会話後：3－4人と話せたら、あなたとあなたの会話の相手がしたことをかきましょう。
4. 自己評価：最後に自己評価をしましょう。

例	Ms. Takaoka	Mr. Obama	Mike	Hiroshi
I went to on a trip.	○	×	○	○
I played shogi.	×	×	○	×

I talked with Ms. Takaoka, Mr. Obama, Mike, and Hiroshi. Ms. Takaoka, Mike, Hiroshi and I went on trips. Mr. Obama didn't go on a trip. Mike and I played shogi.

自己評価

1. 話すことができた。	もっと長くはなせる	できた	2分間話せなかった	あまり話せなかった	全然話せなかった。
2. 自分のしたことをはなせた。	たくさん	はなせた	少し	あまり	No
3. 会話の相手がしたことについて質問できた。	たくさん	できた	少し	あまり	No
4. “how about you?”を使うことができた。	何回も	使った	少し	あまり	No