

**Richard Hill (Kikuzato High School, Nagoya)**

**Teaching Communication Strategies at Kikuzato**

**Subject:** English Communication

**Textbook:** Vision Quest English Expression I Advanced

**Students:** 1<sup>st</sup> Year High School

**Context:** 30 minute 8 classes of 20 students. Mostly see each class once a week.  
(Except for parts of September, October and January when I was with other classes).

**Problems:**

Kikuzato has a split teaching program. Half the class is taught grammar in a traditional method, whilst the other half (with the AET) follows a textbook (which is supposed to encourage communicative activities). The previous 2 AETs just followed the textbook. So they had gone 2 years without a communicative English program. Before the previous 2 AETs, they had Professor Matthew Y. Schaefer who introduced (amongst other programs), communication strategies to the school. I wanted to re-introduce them and emphasize communicative language teaching. I.E “The communication of meaning in interaction rather than the practice and manipulation of grammatical forms in isolation.”(Lightbrown&spada2013).

**Goal:**

To introduce, teach, practice and test students on communication strategies with activities speaking tests thereby improving their communicative ability.

**What I did:**

Between May and July I made 4 communication strategies and created a speaking test to check how much they understood and could utilize appropriately. The four strategies were:

1. Shadowing
  2. Showing Interest
  3. Fillers
  4. Follow-up Questions
  5. Showing Sympathy (Example D)
- Test: Dream Vacation. (Example C)

These were taught in separate lessons alongside the textbook which I was informed I had to cover. We then performed the dream vacation test where the students had to use the conversations they learnt around a script they would memorize. They would receive scores based on how they applied the conversation strategies around the script (Example B). They didn't know who their partner would be beforehand.

After this test I taught the students 3 more conversation strategies.

6. Checking/Clarifying
7. Agreeing/Disagreeing Mild debating
8. Reporting

I taught all three to some classes and was ready to do an improved test. But I got moved to the 2<sup>nd</sup> years for a month and when I came back the students were studying for a speech test that I had little to do with. Regrettably I didn't do any other speaking tests with the students.

In January and February I was at the school sporadically so I took the chance to teach true stories twice to each class. I followed a program where I ended with a fluency exercise. After guessing the story, then reading, vocabulary and grammar exercises students would have to then re-tell the story in 3 different times each getting smaller than the previous, for example 2 minutes, 1.5 minutes and 1 minute.

Since then I have been teaching telephone, internet and various lessons at 英会話's.

## **Results**

There are a lot of incredibly smart and capable students at Kikuzato. Therefore I decided to get qualitative data as some students could express themselves really well. I gave various questionnaires throughout the year and I've taken the information from an end of year evaluation. I wanted to see if I'd made an impact regarding the conversation strategies. So I asked questions about my teaching and about the strategies themselves. I also included questions about my brief spell of teaching true stories also. I think due to the disruptions to my schedule in the year, it would be best to share some interesting quotations from my students as representative of my data:

(Q. How can I improve my teaching of communication strategies?)

***"It may be fun if we can discuss about some topics" (Anon, 2015, 1E).***

This was the same advice Professor Sato gave me. I tried to teach Conversation Strategies generally and using different examples each time. I've been advised by many people to use themes or topics to make more continually and linked progress.

(Q. Which is the hardest Communication Strategy to use and why?)

***"It is hard for me to use Follow-up questions. Because I rarely think of questions and if I think of something, I can't translate into English." (Anon, 2015, 1B).***

A lot of students said this and with hindsight I've realized that I should've devoted a lot more time to practicing Follow-up questions, as it is clearly a harder strategy for the students. Perhaps I've been naïve but also I must appreciate even if the level of the students is high, they still need chances to communicate.

(Q. What was the most useful communication strategy and why?)

***"I think follow-up questions were the most useful because we were able to keep the conversation thanks to follow-up questions." (Anon, 2015 1G).***

This was a response shared by some of the students which I was delighted with naturally. They could see the importance of this strategy and extend their conversations.

(Q. What was the easiest conversation strategy to use and why?)

***"Shadowing is more easier than any other. And showing interest such as 'oh' and 'really' can be spoken naturally. But I always say the same sentence. I want to increase word power." (Anon, 2015, 1F)***

So this student was dissatisfied with saying the same thing all the time for showing interest. Perhaps

if I was more consistent or perhaps had a tighter schedule the student's language could have increased or evolved.

(any other comments or suggestions?)

*"It's hard to memorize sentences in the textbook. I found it frustrating and useless."  
(anon,2015,1A)*

There were lots of negative answers towards the textbook. The students found it very frustrating whenever we used the textbook. This was my fault. Whenever I used the textbook I couldn't help to resort to a very traditional teaching method. I only learned later on to use the textbook in a CLT manner (see what I learned). However the students loved True Stories:

*"I liked the story of teeth (Handsome again?) As I found out there are various forms of beauty."  
(anon,2015,1C).*

Most of the comments were like this. They loved the content and the cultural aspects of True Stories.

### **What I Learned**

I believe I learnt a lot more than my students this year. Two observations and 12 months' worth of Action Report has made me anxious to start the next year more than ever.

There were many things I learned from Action Research. Firstly was a comment by Professor Michael Rector. When he studied my dream vacation test in June/July, he said **"You can't test conversation strategies with a script"**(See Example C). He was right! When I did the conversation strategies test observed by Professor Mutoh, it didn't feel natural. The test also had to include grammar tenses matched to where we were in the allocated textbook which made it even more complicated. The students had memorized fake reactions and the script not only inhibited real reaction, but was also too long. The test was 3 minutes long in a 30 minute class! Other things that I learned from Nancy's visit are as follows:

- Students learn oral communication better without dialogs (though a small amount of organizational help can be useful)
- Dialogs are actually a hindrance in speaking tests and don't give a useful measurement.
- I need to learn about types of data and how to collect, analyze and present them. Making best use of your short class time is the key challenge, so useful homework is important - consider some sort of "conversation card" preparation for conversations. Another powerful addition is warm-up conversations - perfect for your motivated, competent students.

Sadly, this was all the advice I received in May to July that I couldn't improve upon from September immediately. As in September I was moved around so the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> years could be introduced to the AET! I managed to get back in the 1<sup>st</sup> years by October. So this experience has taught me that I need to be a lot more Pre-active. I need to in May work a lot tighter with (even if it's one class) a JT and try and keep the class for the whole 9 working months I am at the school. Then work backwards, set the tests first, set the rubrics and work out (what the JT wants too), and then make CLT activities and classes. This year I got lost with the textbook and I wasn't clear enough to either the teachers or students with how I wanted to conduct communication strategies for the whole year. This is something amongst other things Professor Sato picked up on when he observed my lesson in December and gave the following advice:

- Chaining. Lessons should thread using homeworks to save time. Give pre-homeworks with a few questions to set-up themes that in turn can lead to small talks, then strategies and then using a step-by-step approach give a small essay homework that leads to a bigger

homework etc.

- Unfortunately, I did/could not develop assessment including a speaking test and essay writing. However, I need to solve these issues next year.
- Although I tried many things this year, you need to develop a syllabus and show it to Japanese teachers at the beginning of the school year. I need to teach systematically including assessment.

### **Future Issues**

Kikuzato was an incredible experience and any mistakes or flaws that happened last year was my own lack of planning or naivety. However, I do believe they should leave the AET with the same classes and there should be more teamwork between the communicative side and grammar teaching. I admit though I only realized this after observations and therefore because I've only spent one year there, the benefit is lost on the school! They also need to consider why they are using the textbook. I think whatever benefits they feel the textbook is giving them it is being lost as there is no plan there.

### **Sample Conversation Strategies lesson:**

This was a 3 step lesson plan from November. It is a mess!

It basically shows the difficulty I had reviewing conversation strategies after not doing them for so long, incorporating the textbook into the lessons and the 30 minute classes.

### **Days One, Two and Three Lesson Plans**

#### **Day One:**

1. Students receive the dream school handout and then discuss Kikuzato using conversation strategies we studied previously. We reviewed the strategies beforehand.
2. Then there is a listening exercise where I tell them about English High school and they make notes and then use Conversation Strategies with the new information.
3. They then make their own 'dream schools' and discuss them in pairs and groups.
4. They are encouraged to read

#### **Day Two:**

1. Students looked at the dialogue, we analyze together and check the meanings. Then we look at conversation strategy 5, showing sympathy. Students are to learn in a step by step practice how to show basic sympathy in an unfortunate circumstance.
2. They practice after each step and create their own original unfortunate circumstance.
3. Also in the conversation I point out where the grammar from their textbook is used in the sheets so then we are studying communicatively and covering the textbook.
4. Students are introduced to the test and rubric. They are also introduced to the test topic 'I place that I like'.

#### **Day Three**

1. Students look at Conversation strategies 6 and apply to them to conversations, either dream school for some who need more guidance or an original conversation for those who don't.
2. Then we study lesson 8's dialogue and using the grammar highlight in the textbook students create their own conversation in order to further understand the grammar.
3. We then apply the strategies to lesson 8 and 9.
4. Students then fill out a questionnaire which gauges simply how difficult the strategies are.

## **Example A**

### **Dream School Discussion**

#### **Step 1**

*How's your \_\_\_\_\_?  
What's your \_\_\_\_\_ like?*

**PLEASE USE**

**Shadowing  
and**

#### **Step 2**

**Showing interest**

Rotate, with a follow-up question.

#### **Step 3**

Then get into groups and decide the perfect dream school; *fun + educational*

Then go and ask other groups about their dream school. First ask:

*Hows your \_\_\_\_\_?  
Whats your \_\_\_\_\_ like?*

Then these follow up questions:

***Q. Why is your dream school fun?      A. Our dream school is fun because***

*Sorry I disagree, because*

**or**

*I agree with you because \_\_\_\_\_ / You're right because \_\_\_\_\_.*

***Q. Why is your dream school educational?      A. Our dream school is educational because \_\_\_\_\_.***

*Sorry I disagree, because*

**or**

*I agree with you because \_\_\_\_\_ / You're right because \_\_\_\_\_.*

## **Example B**

### **Criteria for Dream Vacation Speech test**

#### **Criteria for 1<sup>st</sup> speech test**

**Appropriate timing of Conversation Strategy    1 3 5**

**Accurate use of Conversation Strategy          1 3 5**

**Confidence, eye contact and volume            1 3 5**

**Follow-up questions                                1 3 5**

## Example C

Aim: Is for students to practice future tense and introduce some natural English techniques.

### Dream Vacation

Possible Model conversation.

I'm planning on going to Brazil. I'm going there in June. I'll go there by plane.  
I'll stay there for 1 month. I'm going with my friends. I will watch the world cup.

A: Hey! Let's talk about our dream vacations.

B: Why not ?!

A: Ok, where are you planning to go?

B: I'm planning to go to (        )                      (A): (        )

A: *Awesome !* When are you going there?

B: I'm going there in (        )                      (A): (        )

A: *That's sounds fantastic.* How will you go there?

B: I'll go there by (        ).                      (A): (        )

A: How long will you stay there?

B: I'll stay there for (        ).                      (A): (        )

A: Who are you going with?

B: I'm going with (        ).

A: What are you going to do?

B: I'm going to (        ).

A: *Great !* ( follow up question )

B: Ok please tell me about yours (switch and go back to the second A)

## Example D

### Conversation Strategies 5

#### Step 1:

A: Problems:

I couldn't sleep last night.

I have lost my wallet.

I have a slight headache.

I broke up with my boyfriend.

Original Problem

B: Showing Sympathy:

Oh No!

That's too bad!

I'm sorry to hear that.

**Step 2:**

A: **Problems:**

I couldn't sleep last night.  
I have lost my wallet.  
I have a slight headache.  
I broke up with my boyfriend.  
Original Problem

B: **Showing Sympathy:**

Oh No!  
That's too bad!  
I'm sorry to hear that.

B: **Advice:**

How about.....

**Step 3:**

A: **Problems:**

I couldn't sleep last night.  
I have lost my wallet.  
I have a slight headache.  
I broke up with my boyfriend.  
Original Problem

B: **Showing Sympathy:**

Oh No!  
That's too bad!  
I'm sorry to hear that.

B: **Advice:**

How about.....

A: **Grateful Response:**

It's kind of you to say so  
Thank you for your help.  
Thank you for your advice.

**Conversation Strategies 7**

I agree with you. / I disagree with you.

I

I believe that....

I think that....

I know that.....

**Persuasion**

Please consider.....

You should think about.....

**Debate/Other opinions**

I would argue that.....

I completely disagree....

I completely agree.....

**Example Conversation**

**A:** Hey, what do you think about Lady Gaga

**B:** I think that she is fantastic.

**A:** I completely disagree. She is rubbish.

**B:** Oh, please consider her songs.....

**Conversation Strategies 8**

He said.....

She said.....

He / She thought that .....

He / She replied.....

My friend said.....

My father says that.....

John said that .....

The newspaper reported.....

It stated on the website.....

My brother told me that.....

**Example conversation**

**A:** My dad said that Barack Obama is coming to Japan.

**B:** Ahh yes, the newspaper reported that he will meet Shinzo Abe.

**A:** Yeah my dad told me that too.

**B:** It was on the news too.

**A:** And the BBC website. It stated that.....

What are Conversation Strategies?

4. Follow-up questions

Follow-up questions are important to get more information and show enthusiasm.

Use these W/H/D words to make questions,

What..... Where..... Why..... Who..... When..... How..... Do..... Did.....

For example,

Friend

You

*Answer: I went to Gifu last week.*

*Question: I see. How was the weather?*

*Answer: It was sunny.*

*Answer: I want to go and eat.*

*Question: O.K. What kind of food do you want?*

*Answer: Italian food!*

*Answer: I will visit my hometown soon.*

*Question: Where is that?*

*Answer: Gifu.*

*Answer: I don't like Science.*

*Question: Why don't you like it?*

*Answer: It's too hard.*

*Answer: I really, really like somebody?*

*Question: Who do you like?*

*Answer: Richard! He is beautiful!*

*Answer: Oh no! I have a big test!*

*Question: When is it?*

*Answer: It's tomorrow!*

*Answer: I'm having spaghetti tonight.*

*Question: Great! Do you like Italian food?*

*Answer: Yes, I love it!*

*Answer: I have lived in Nagoya for awhile .Question: Which high school did you go to?*

*Answer: I went to Kikuzato High School.*

Please make 6 follow-up questions with a friend!

I went to \_\_\_\_\_ Junior High School.

Follow up Question: \_\_\_\_\_

Answer: \_\_\_\_\_

I want to visit \_\_\_\_\_.

Follow up Question: \_\_\_\_\_

Answer: \_\_\_\_\_

I like playing \_\_\_\_\_.

Follow up Question: \_\_\_\_\_

Answer: \_\_\_\_\_

My favorite animal is the \_\_\_\_\_.

Follow up Question: \_\_\_\_\_

Answer: \_\_\_\_\_

I usually have \_\_\_\_\_ for breakfast.

Follow up Question: \_\_\_\_\_

Answer: \_\_\_\_\_

During the summer break I \_\_\_\_\_

Follow up Question: \_\_\_\_\_

Answer: \_\_\_\_\_

Conversation Skills

3. Fillers

Fillers are useful to give you thinking time.

- Uh.....
- Um/Erm.....
- Well.....
- Let's see.....
- Hmmm.....

For example,

Where do you want to go?	Uh.....I want to go to Brazil.
What would you like to eat?	Um.....I would like to eat chicken.
When will we meet again?	Well.....Tuesday night?
What time is it?	Let's see.....It's about 7:30.
Do you want to play soccer?	Hmm... not right now thank you.

Please make 4 sentences about you!

<u>You</u>	<u>Friend</u>
Where do you want to ( )?	_____
What would you like to ( )?	_____
When will we ( ) again?	_____
Do you want to ( )?	_____

Now, please tell a friend and practice fillers.

Conversation Skills?

1. Shadowing

Shadowing means you are a good listener (interested) and shows you understand!

For example,

I went to China this morning.	China! Really?
My girlfriend is Lady Gaga!	Lady Gaga! Great!
Tomorrow, I'm going to Gifu.	Gifu! I see.
I want to go to Kumamoto next week!	Kumamoto! How interesting!

Please make 4 sentences about you!

<u>You</u>	<u>Friend</u>
I went to ( ) this morning	_____
My boyfriend/girlfriend is ( )	_____
Tomorrow, I'm going to ( )	_____
I want to go to ( ) next week	_____

Now, please tell a friend and practice shadowing!

Conversation Skills

2. Showing interest

Please be a good and friendly listener! Make nice comments!

I see. / O.K	Little interested.
Great! / Good!	Interested.
Fantastic! / Awesome!	Very interested.
Wow! / Oh really?	Surprised.

For example,

I like chocolate.	I see.
I went to Tokyo last summer!	Good!
I passed the test with 99%!	Awesome!
I'm moving to South Africa!	Oh really?

Please make 4 sentences about you!

You

Friend

I like \_\_\_\_\_

I went to \_\_\_\_\_

I am \_\_\_\_\_

I want to \_\_\_\_\_

Now, please tell a friend and practice showing interest!