

# Action Research Final Report 2015

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1. Title: Creating Communicative Writing Class

2. Teaching context

- 1) Level: 2nd grade of high school
- 2) Class size: 18/20 students × 4 classes
- 3) Time: 50mins × 2/week
- 4) Textbook: Vision Quest II (Keirinkan)
- 5) Problems:

This is my first year to teach “English Expression II”, a new subject under the new course of study. One of the main goals of this class is to improve students’ writing ability. However, I have never taught a writing class before. When I taught a “writing” class, it was more like a grammar class and students did not write at all.

I taught some of the students last year, but most of the students were new. They were not familiar with doing activities in class.

Another big problem is that most of my colleagues are not willing to spend more time on communicative tasks because of the limited time and the complicated assessment. We agreed to have performance tests. However, it is hard and almost impossible to set a time to have a meeting with other teachers this year.

3. Goals:

- To have students be able to write English essays on various topics.
- Students will be able to express their opinions logically and clearly.
- Students will be able to understand their classmates’ English and can react to them.
- Students can help each other to improve their English abilities.

4. What I did:

- Timed-conversation / Small talk
- Performance Tests:
  - ◇ Speech with Q&A (July)
  - ◇ Interpretation Test (October)
  - ◇ Pre-test & **Conversation Test** (February)
- Writing: Essay writing
  - ◇ Are you for or against? / Chain letter activity
  - ◇ (school uniforms, death penalty, surnames, etc.)
  - ◇ “Good points and bad points of cellphones”
  - ◇ “Dogs or cats” ( rice or bread, living in an urban area or a rural area, etc.)
  - ◇ “My most memorable present”
- Brain storming, Peer-reading / Peer- editing, common errors
- Survey: Questionnaires(April, July, March), Self-evaluation(after each PT), recording

5. Results:

I was finally able to conduct a conversation test in February. Even it was only in my class, students did not complain. A lot of students mentioned that the performance tests helped them improve their communication skills.

According to the Chart 1, more than 90%(72 students) of the students felt they could improve their speaking skills. 40 students said it was because they had learned conversation strategies, and 38 students said it was because they had practiced a lot. Six students felt they needed more practice to improve their speaking skills.

Chart 2 shows that 95% of the students (72 students) felt they could improve their writing skills. Compared with Chart1, more students (39%, 29 students) answered that they could improve their writing skills very much. For that reasons, 38 students said that's because they had written a lot, and 29 students said because they became conscious of connecting words or adverbs. 15 students felt that peer-editing helped them to improve their writing skills. A few students mentioned they needed to learn grammar more, or had to broaden their vocabulary.

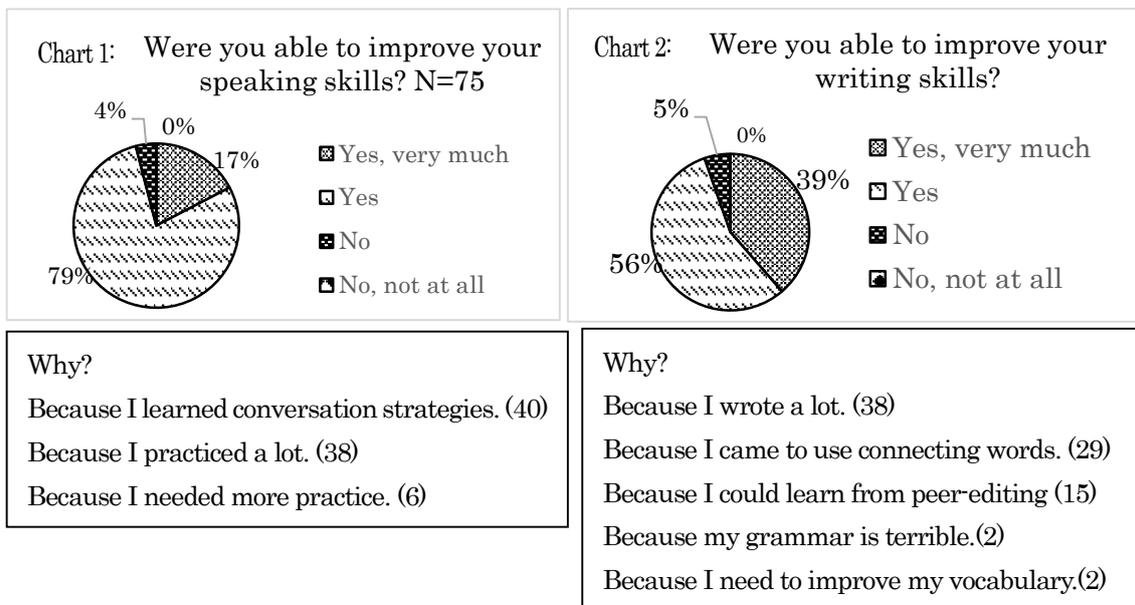


Chart 3 shows that students felt that they were able to improve their communication skills. 46 students felt performance tests helped them to improve their communication skills.

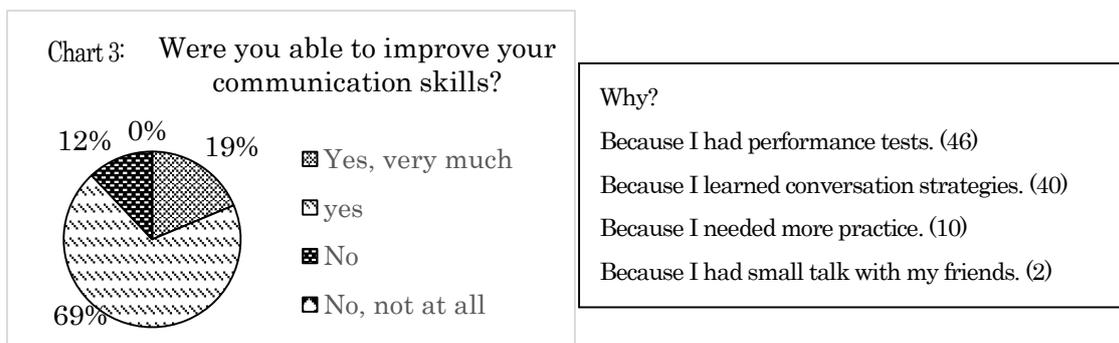
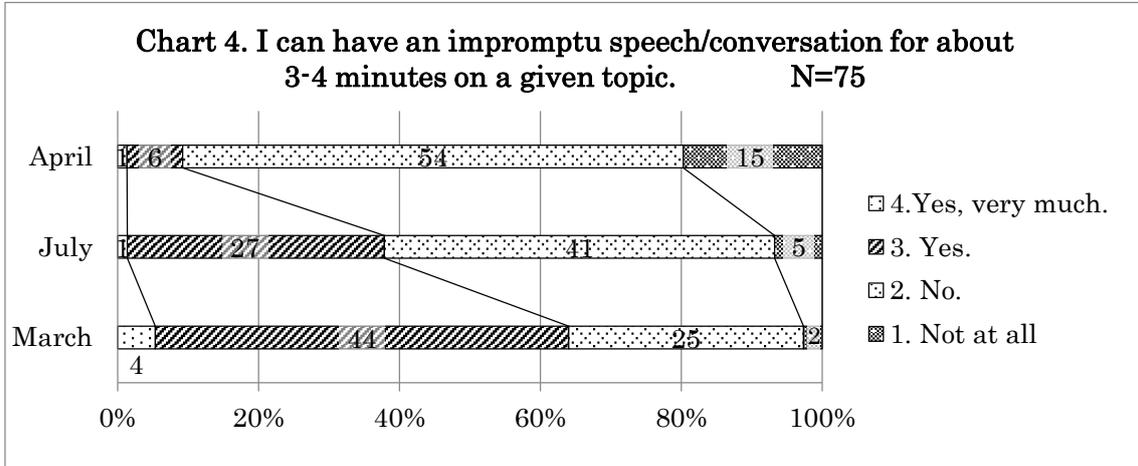


Chart 4 to 9 shows how students' answers changed throughout a year.

According to Chart 4, students greatly improved their conversation skills. Students actually experienced 3-4 minutes timed conversation in class. In February, they took 3.5 minutes conversation tests. Those experiences seemed to influence their answers.



According to the Chart 5, in class D, there are more students who felt lack of speaking skills. Class C and D are science courses and there are more boys than girls: about 15 boys and 5 girls. Class A and B are the opposite: about 5 boys and 15 girls.

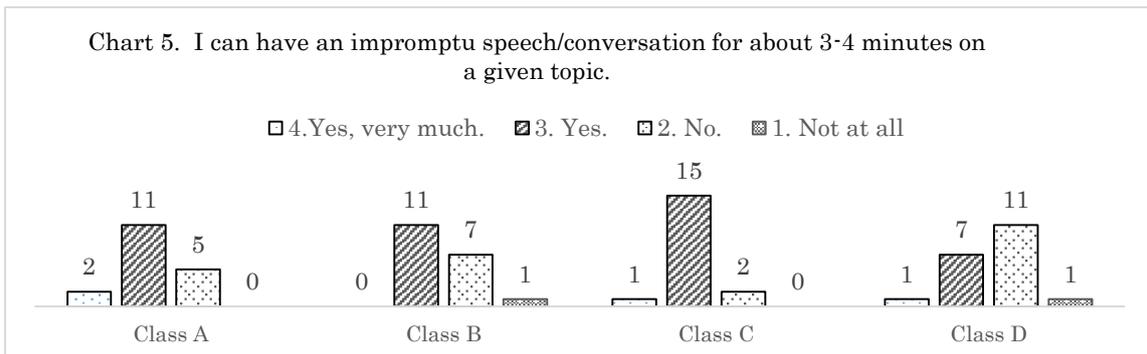
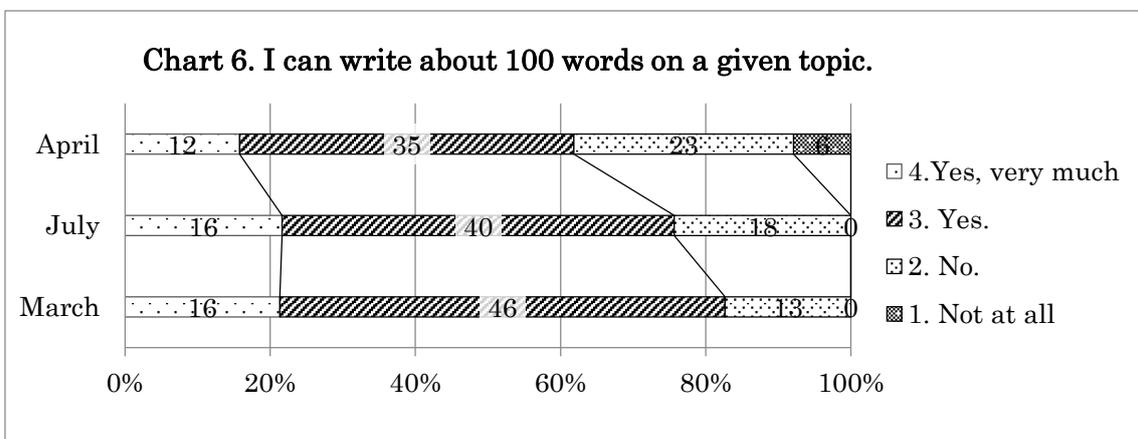


Chart 6 showed how they improve their writing ability. Compared with the answer in April, there was no one who chose "not at all" in both July and March. The number of "no" is decreasing, too.



One interesting thing is that one of the four classes I taught, everyone had either “yes, very much” or “yes”. (see Chart 7). No one had a negative answer. Since they had a few more classes than others, they spent more time on writing. What is more, the class atmosphere was cooperative. Students were willing to work together.

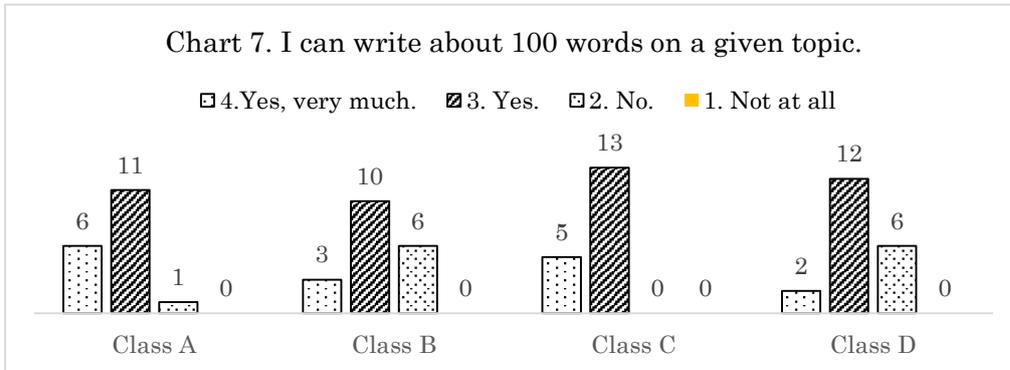
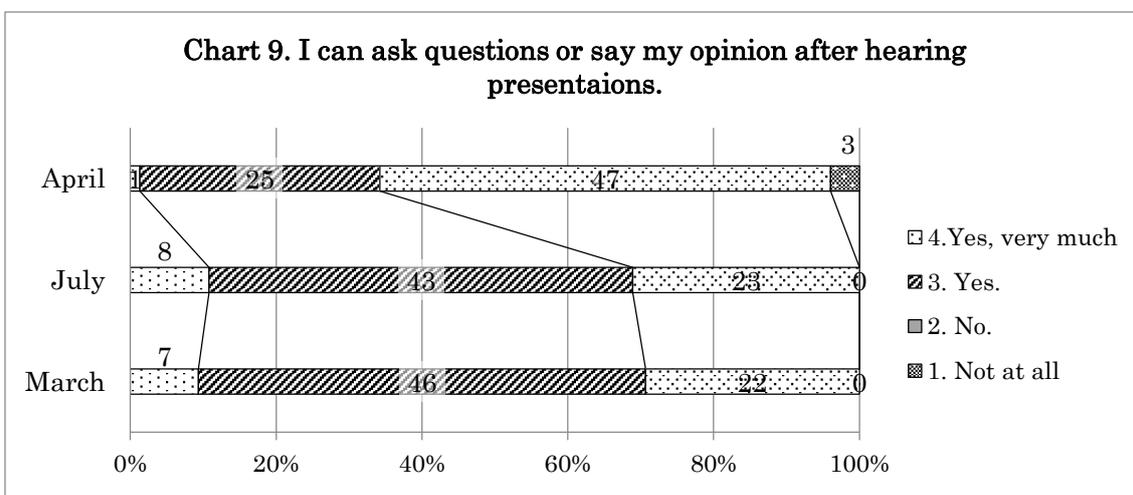
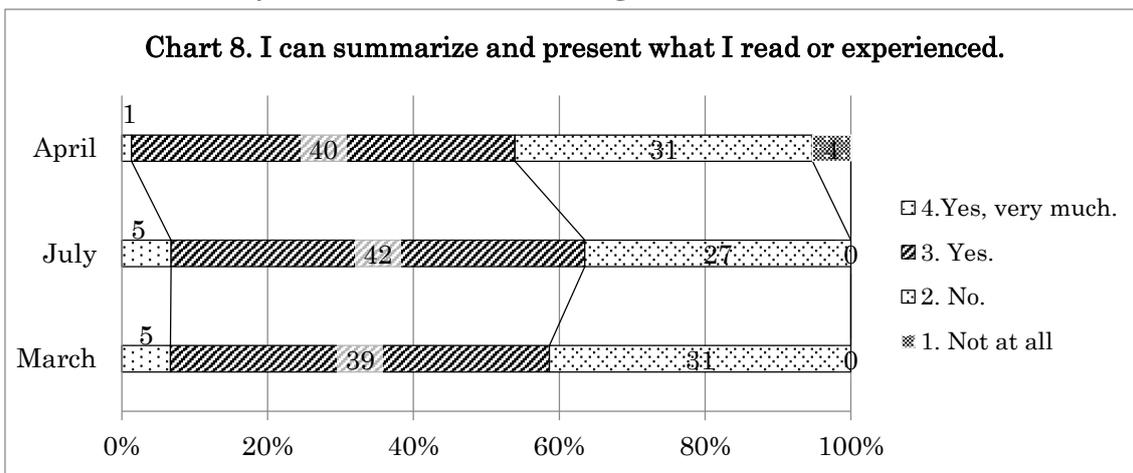


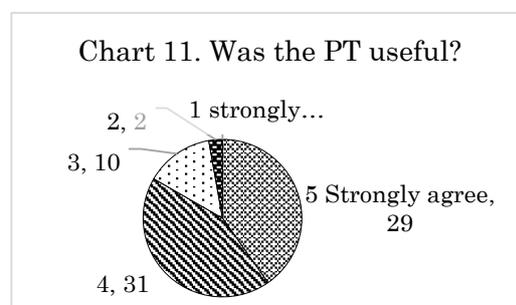
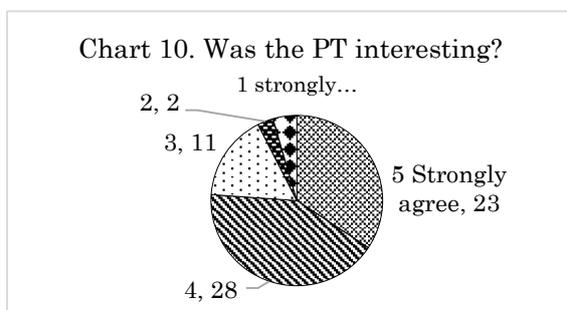
Chart 8 and 9 show that the results didn’t change much from July to March. There were not many opportunities for students to focus on summarizing and presenting what they read or experienced after summer. They also didn’t have much practice asking questions or saying their opinions after hearing presentations. Students practiced making follow-up questions for a conversation, but they needed to learn summarizing skills as well.



After the final conversation test, students filled in a self-evaluation sheet. The results indicated that most of the students were able to understand what their partner said, and they also made themselves understood in English. They also felt the conversation test was interesting as well as useful.

Their comments show that students really benefited a lot from this conversation test. Students not only wanted to get good scores on pen-and-paper tests, but they wanted to improve their communication skills for their real life. Furthermore, students noticed how their communication skills improve by practicing a lot.

One student who strongly disagreed with the question “was the PT interesting?” strongly agreed that the PT was useful. He said, “I couldn’t enjoy it at all because there were teachers in front of me and I got very nervous. I couldn’t ask questions that I normally can. But that’s a test, and I think it is useful.” I should have given them more conversation tests so that they could get used to it.



*We will have many chances to talk with foreigners in the future, so it was very useful.*

*I realized that I can make myself understood in English.*

*I enjoyed it because my partner was my best friend.*

*I thought it is important to think the answer while listening.*

*It was interesting to talk, but I was nervous and couldn't talk fluently.*

*I think I can make many friends when I can talk in English.*

*I think I can improve the impromptu speaking skills very much though PT.*

*I used similar expressions. I want to learn various expressions.*

*I think I can improve my skills though PT, so I want to do this kind of test several times.*

*Then I will try more positively.*

*I think there are more chances to talk in English than write.*

*I think it is useful to improve my listening skills, too.*

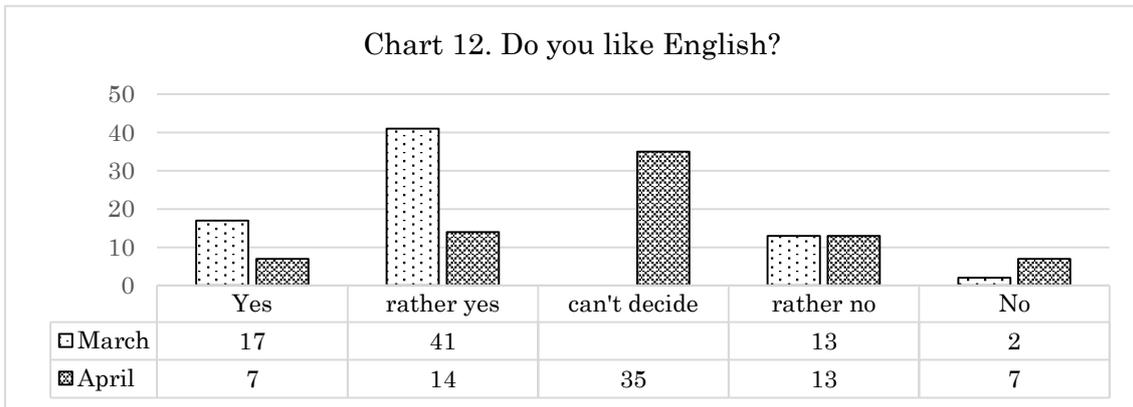
*I have to listen very carefully for a conversation, so it is also a good way to practice listening.*

*I don't have any chance to talk in English beside this class, so I enjoyed it.*

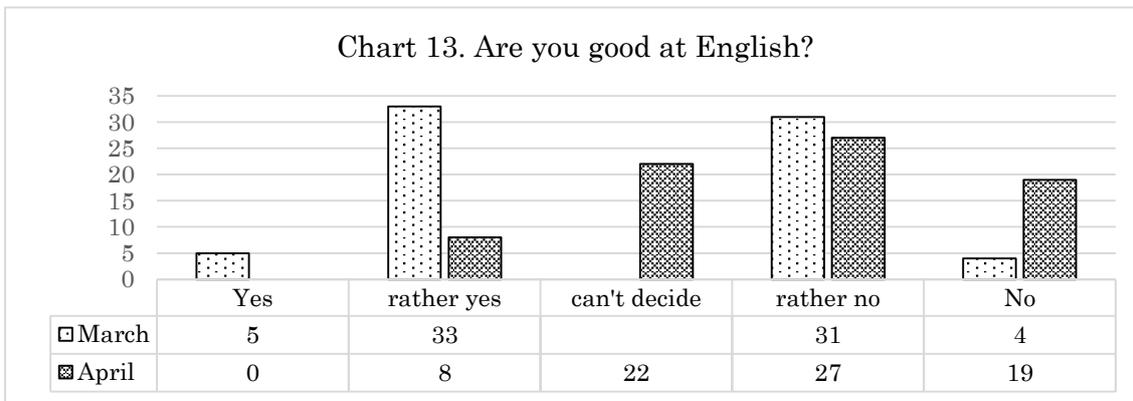
*It was a good experience.*

*CS came out naturally as I practiced a lot.*

More students came to like English in March (See Chart 12), but there are still half students who do not have enough confidence (see Chart 13). I didn't give the “can't decide” as a choice in March.



As students had enough practice using English, they gained confidence. The average scores of each term examination were much better than those of last year's.



#### Performance tests:

In July, I suggested a topic and made a rubric to share with all other teachers. I wanted students to have an impromptu conversation, so after making a speech, listeners had to ask questions and the speaker answered each question. The Q & A section went smoothly, but it seemed that students avoided asking challenging questions and their questions were rather easy and simple to answer. Therefore there was no negotiation of meaning in the Q & A section. Moreover, other teachers changed or even didn't use the rubric I made. They did how they wanted. There was no time for meeting or sharing ideas or concerns with other teachers, it was impossible to do the same performance test. However, teachers wanted to do the similar style of performance tests for the fair assessment.

In October, all students took an English interpretation test. Each teacher chose and provided some speech scripts for students to memorize. One teacher only gave a script and all students in his class used the same speech. Another teacher gave a few speeches for students to choose from and practiced with an ALT. The good points were that students took it seriously and practiced outside the class. Teachers felt happy to see the students walking practicing English speeches in the school. Teachers also mentioned that memorizing a famous speech was better than the students' own speeches since there were less mistakes.

I think one of the benefits of this performance test was that other teachers felt the positive washback effect of performance tests.

For the final term performance test, I wanted to try a conversation test, but other teachers preferred to do a skit. So we agreed that each teacher do whatever he/she wants as long as students perform in pairs or a group for the February performance test. I've been doing timed conversation and having students use conversation strategies. Students not only write about the topic, they also talked about it in pairs.

#### More students' comments

*Writing a lot of essays and having many peer-reading activities, I could improve my writing and speaking. I want to use my skills.*

*I think it is good to keep a journal in English to improve more.*

*I'm not good at English, but I came to like it more than before because I talked a lot in class.*

*I'm very interested in foreign languages and thinking of majoring a foreign language in the university. I'd like to explore new things. I want to learn practical English.*

*I want to become more fluent.*

*There was time to speak English with friends. I didn't like English Expression last year so it was very fun!!*

*I enjoyed learning because I could communicate with others.*

*I want to be able to talk without making a lot of grammar mistakes.*

#### 6. What I learned

I learned the importance of doing action research and data collection. The positive results especially students' comments encouraged me very much. Compared with my previous research, I was not feeling so positive about the result of students' survey outcome this year. Because I was not able to have teacher collaboration this year. In addition, I was not able to do a conversation test till February. (However, it was much better than not doing any conversation tests throughout a year.) I hadn't noticed how much students changed until I compared the data for this final report. Reading all the students' comments, I re-realized how important to give enough opportunities to expose them to communicative activities including assessment. Students gradually acquire English. Teachers need to be patient with students.

Another important finding was that students not only improved their English skills, but they also deepened and developed their critical thinking skills. By exchanging ideas with others and trying to write logically using connecting words helped them to develop their ideas and creativity.

#### 7. Future issues

- Teacher collaboration is necessary
- More than one conversation test in a year is ideal
- Integrating 4 skills
- Developing students' critical thinking skills more

# Lesson Plan

1. Level: 2nd graders of Senior High School
2. Class size: 20 students
3. Textbook: Vision Quest ( Keirinkan)
  
4. Goal & Objectives:
  - 1) Students can talk about some good points and bad points of cellphone.
  - 2) They can use causative verbs appropriately.
  - 3) They can ask/answer follow-up questions after each presentation.
  
5. Procedure:
  - 1) Day one                      Small talk  
   Listening, T/F, Dictation  
   Brain-storming in pairs  
   1st draft
  - 2) Day two                      Textbook exercises  
   Peer-reading, Peer-editing
  - 3) Day three                      Common Errors,  
   Final draft
  
6. Today's lesson plan (Day one):
  - 1) Greeting
  - 2) Small Talk:                  When did you get your cell phone?  
   What do you do with your cell phone?  
   How many hours do you use a cell phone a day?
  - 3) Textbook Listening without looking at the textbook  
   Questions after listening  
   T&F  
   Dictations in pairs
  - 4) Brain-storming in pairs: Good points and bad points of cellphones  
   (Japanese OK, but write key words in English)
  - 5) Writing the 1<sup>st</sup> draft: try to use connecting words



## Students' writings (final draft):

Cell phones are now essential to our lives. Cell phones are very convenient item. I'll talk about the good points. First, we can use the Internet wherever we are. For example, when we don't know train time schedule, we can search it. Second, we know a sudden change in schedule. What is more, communication becomes easy.

On the other hand, I think that the cell phone has the bad points. First of all, we can't concentrate on our studies. We play the game, that's why we don't study. Second, our eyes get tired. Because we watch cell phone too much.

That's why cell phones are very convenient we should be careful how we use them.

(115 words)

Cell phones are necessary goods for our daily life. First of all, I think the advantage of cell phones is that we can get the latest information wherever we are. For example, when I want to know how the weather will be, I can searching weather information soon.

On the other hand, the disadvantage of it is that our eyesight gets worse. In fact, my eyesight has been getting worse since I started using cell phones.

Therefore cell phones has many advantages and disadvantages so we should decide how long we use it.

(93 words)

Recently, percentage of having a cellphone is very high. I'll write good and bad points of them.

First of all, one of good points of cell phones is a connection. For example, even if your friend transfers to a school far away from your school, you can talk with your friend easily Besides, you can communicate with people you don't know. Why? Because it makes it possible to use SNS such as twitter, Facebook, etc. A century ago, who could expect that? Cellphones may be a bridge to the unknown world.

On the other hand, it has some bad points. Some people tend to be conscious of cellphones. During the dinner, class, and walking, it is dangerous and makes other people unpleasant. Second point is the leak of information. My friend actually has leaked his own personal information in twitter. At that time, he was very upset and filled with anxiety.

I think cellphones are very useful and dangerous. Is a cellphone a bad invention? It hasn't decided yet. Who decides it is the user.

(175 words)