

Promoting Focus on Form Activities in JHS

Richard Hill

Final AR Report 2016

Teaching ContextJHS 3rd year students,

3 classes of 32 students (1 class with permission to conduct AR projects)

Lessons once/twice every two weeks (with myself as an AET)

Textbook: New Horizon 3

Problems

Students were receiving memory exercises whilst just working through the textbook in a traditional manner. Occasionally there were lessons that focused on describing pictures with an aim to improve answering particular Eikan questions.

Review activities were not encouraged or employed.

There was little student to student interaction or communication.

Goals

To show (to the JT) how focus on form activities can be employed in reviews as opposed to a traditional teaching manner.

To increase student to student interaction.

To increase students English class enjoyment.

To introduce Small Talk supported by 3 Conversation Strategies to the JT and students to facilitate conversations.

JT Goals

The JT wanted me to continue helping the students go through the New Horizon

To help conduct with already prepared memory tests.

What I did

I showed the JT textbooks on focus on form activities and from December used them as reviews for the learned grammar point.

I chained the lessons/activity-time

I gave basic questionnaires to engage understanding and reaction.

I monitored the use of the target language (after early January).

I used the questionnaires to convince the JT to use these activities in the future.

In February (after receiving advice through AR discussion) chained activities in a step

by step approach and monitored language more closely through observation, exercise repetition and questionnaires.

Previously to December we sporadically did small talk, taught and facilitated the following 3 conversation strategies within the conversations to aid small talk:

- Openers and Closers
- Showing Interest
- Follow-up Questions

What I learned

From my AR projects

I started AR projects at one JHS and changed the focus several times until I tried the current above project at a different JHS. This has taught me the value into researching and identifying an AR plan with the JT. It wasn't until I really pushed the JT, (after a lesson observation by Professor Sato), that she gave me the opportunity to apply some Focus on Form activities. I've realized I need to be more considered and have a clear plan to collaborate with. Not separately apply. AETs are expected to be flexible and lessons or chains of lessons can be chopped with little notice. My preparation has to be adaptable and allow for this.

It was a lot easier to apply my activities when I made it clear they were going to be utilized as reviews. So an elaborate plan from the beginning with reference to activities would have been more effective in convincing the Japanese teacher. Perhaps I could've conducted AR projects at both JHSs I worked at with this plan and then I wouldn't have had to start again a few times.

Small talk aided by conversation strategies worked really well. I was unable to get a performance test however but the small talks still warmed up the students and chained the previous lessons homework. The students also expressed their enjoyment in their answers on my questionnaires.

About Focus on Form Instruction Activities

The activities that were applied worked well in terms of adaptation and application. They were easily changed to suit my students and the students took to them with explicit instruction.

I focused on the students understanding and enjoyment, however (as highlighted by

Professor Kindt) in January I missed an opportunity to check more for accuracy. I could have been more considerate but too be clear the students became an afterthought and it was more about convincing the teacher. This was slack on my behalf. With this in mind I was more careful with measuring accuracy in February where I monitored language more closely through repetitions and a step by step approach.

From Questionnaires

The questionnaires were designed with the sole purpose of convincing the JT that the students enjoyed and understood the focus on form activities. One note to add is that the JT requested the questionnaire to be in English so it is designed to be easily answered. With reference to the results the students clearly understood and enjoyed the activity.

From JT Questionnaire

After the last lesson we had together I conducted an interview with my JT and recorded it. I have kindly been given permission to share some relevant questions and answers here

(the JT kindly allowed me to edit and include context so everyone can comprehend):

Q. You conducted a lot of memory based tasks this year with the students....

Yes! I think it's important for students to learn how to memorize words and paragraphs and stories. That is how I learned English when I was a young student.

Q. What did you think of the communication cards I employed this year?

They were great. I saw many lines of students speaking to you every day.

Q. Did you think the communication strategies were useful?

I think it is important for the students to improve their conversation skills. I think at JHS small talks are more useful as they can be warm ups for the students.

Q. Did you like the Focus on Form activities?

Yes. I think they can be good reviews.

Q. Will you come to the NUFS workshop in May or some time?

Yes. But please send me a mail.

Activity Plans

Here are three plans for activities conducted in June, December, January and February. These have been included as they were times I was able to complete activities. Also they supported my goals.

June; Small talk introduction

1. **Goal:** Overall, to introduce basic conversation and improve students' communicative competence.

Sub Goal: To make sure that students are continuing to understand and use the target language in the textbook.

2. **Procedure**

Today's plan: Introduction to Small Talks

- The J.T and I demonstrate 3 full small talks using the introduction to small talk patterns. Questions are asked after to check for understanding.
- The students then practice small talks using the different patterns 4 times and rotate clockwise so they practice with different partners. Using a help sheet.
- Students are invited to perform to the rest of the class.
- Afterwards, the J.T and I demonstrate 3 small talks that include the target language (in the New Horizon 3) 'have you ever'. Questions are asked after to check for understanding.
- Students are then encouraged to have small talks including the 'have you ever' grammar point. They are encouraged to not use the guidance of the help sheet. But try to either remember or improvise. They are reminded of 'been', 'tried' and 'eaten' to help form 'have you ever' questions.
- Students are invited to perform to the rest of the class.
- Students fill out the reflection sheet anonymously.

What happened

What I observed

Students really appreciated the chance to converse with each other. It highlighted how starved they were of conversational experience in the classroom. I particularly was pleased that their willingness and motivation was to try small talk was very high.

Although they were not enthused at performing small talks at the front of class in front of everyone. So this was removed in all the small talk that was conducted since. I didn't see the point in forcing students to perform at the front if they didn't want to.

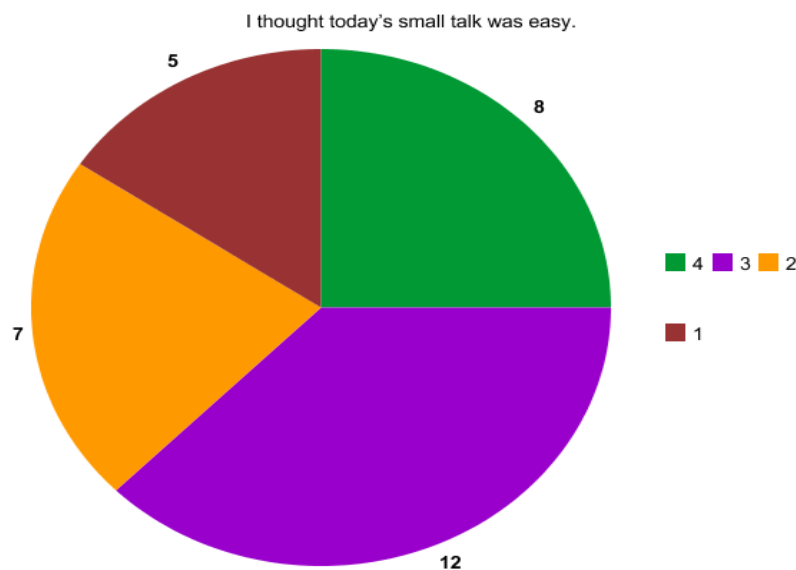
Survey Results: Reflection

For the questions I asked all thirty-two students to respond on a Likert scale from strongly agree to strongly disagree with 4 options. The J.T helped make sure they all answered.

4: Strongly Agree 3: Agree a little 2: Disagree a little 1: Strongly disagree

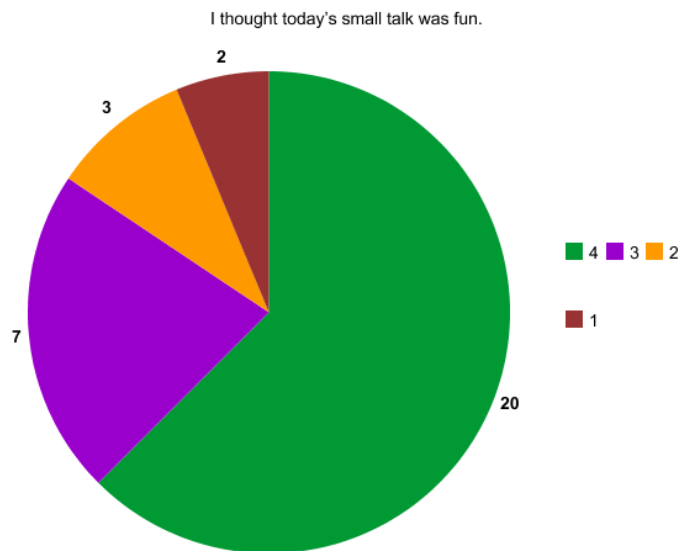
Question 1: I thought today's small talk was easy.

A fourth strongly agreed that small talk was easy (8/32). More agreed it was a little easy (12/32). Just less than a quarter (7/32) disagreed a little that it was easy. Then a few students (5/32) strongly disagreed that small talk was easy.



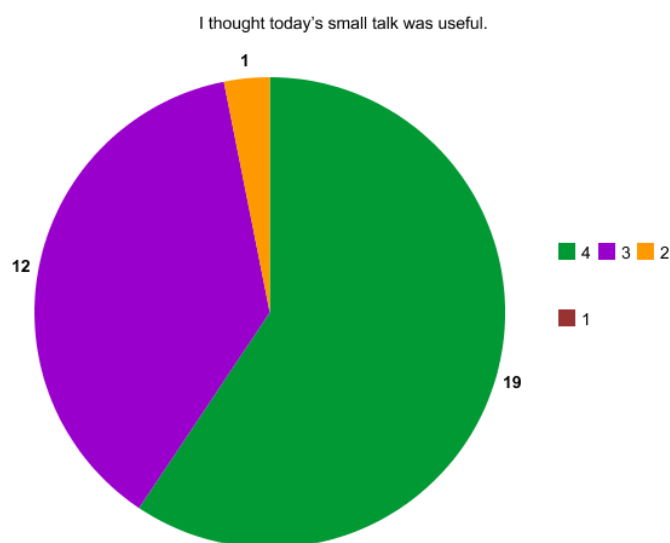
Question 2: I thought today's small talk was fun.

The majority (20/32) believed the small talk was fun. Less than a quarter (7/32) slightly agreed that it was fun. A few students slightly disagreed (3/32) and even fewer students (2/32) strongly disagreed.



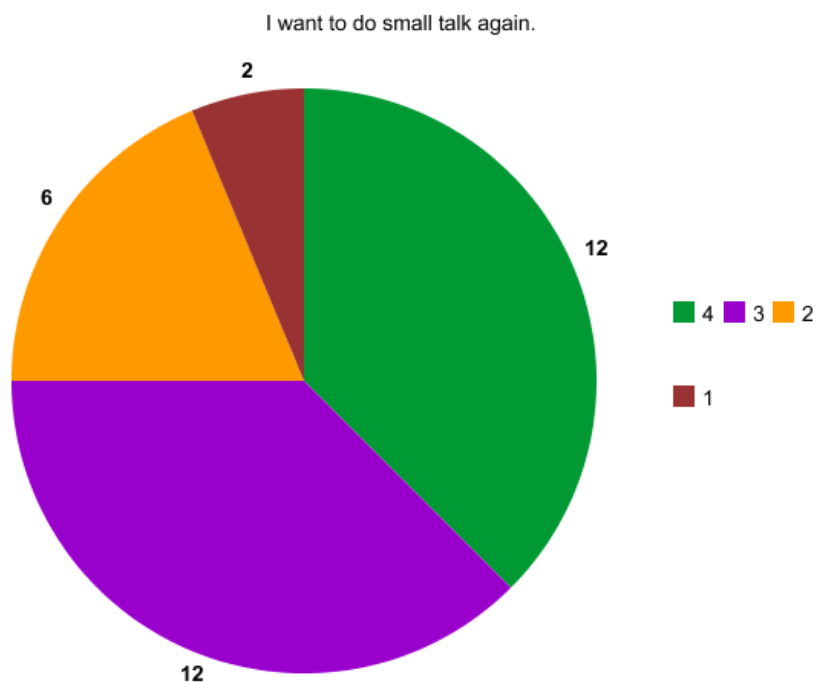
Question 3: I thought today's small talk was useful.

More than half (**19/32**) strongly thought small talk was useful. (**12/32**) Thought that small is a little useful. (**1/32**) slightly disagreed with the statement and (**0/32**) nobody strongly disagreed.



Question 4: I want to do small talk again.

(**12/32**) Strongly want to do it again and (**12/32**) slightly agree that they want to do small talk again. (**6/32**) slightly disagree with this statement and (**2/32**) very much disagree with this statement.



Some selected comments translated

'I found the small talks fun but useless' (Student 4, June 2015)

'The small talks were hard and I don't want to do them again' (Student 21, June 2015)

'I think small talks will help me talk to foreigners' (Student 7, June 2015)

'Why I we doing small talks and not the textbook' (Student 30, June 2015)

December:

1. Goal:

JT requested that I review 'who' as in 'Bell is the man who invented the telephone.'

2. Procedure:

- **Pre task:** Go through four celebrities (Sakurai Sho, Mao Asada, Cristiano Ronaldo, Karyu Pamyu Pamyu) with examples of the 'who' sentence.

Example: Look at this picture. This the man who plays soccer in Spain.

Who is he Yuma?

- **Task 1:** Worksheet 1 Quiz, first students solely fill in the blanks. Students then get into groups of 4 and read to check the answers one by one. Then check as a class (if needed or students get all the answers wrong)

- **Task 2:** Students make a 5 question quiz individually.

In groups of four students select 8 questions together to make a group quiz.

Than groups will test other groups. Due to time constraints groups

1, 2,3 and 4 will test each other and 5,6,7 and 8 simultaneously.

What happened

What I observed

Students enjoyed and understood the opening warm up. The JT was surprised they understood without explicit explanation. They then answered the quiz with no concerns and we didn't check as a class as they got them all right. They then successfully made quizzes individually. I told them to try and pick really famous people but I really had no idea who they were. I was informed that they were mostly Jpop and Kpop idols. I told them, they could only use each verb twice. As there was a moment were it could have been 8 singers. We did the group quiz simultaneously. I observed 1-4 and the JT observed 5-8. The students really enjoyed the competitiveness.

Late January to early February lessons

1. Goal:

For students to be able to write an essay with the title: "I person who I admire".

2. Procedure:

Today's plan:

- Students are to listen to a small talk between the JT and I about a person each we admire. It will have an opener and closer and follow-up questions.
- Students are to practice small talk and rotate. The first small talk will be 1:30, 1:20 and 1:10 to try and increase their pace and aid fluency.

- Students are then to practice again with added follow-up questions and showing interest.
- Homework is then a 3/4 sentence paragraph of one person who they admire.
- The students will then use this in the next class's small talk. And practice as they did before.
- The 6/7 sentence is then checked and common mistakes are addressed on the board together.
- Students are introduced to homework write 7/8 lines on someone who admire.

What happened**What I observed**

Students loved doing small talk again after not doing it for a while. They particularly liked the repeated small talk with the homework that helped them. The JT was involved with regards to this as she made sure all students had at least chosen a person they admired or she got them to do their homework. So that was great as it was real collaboration. Unfortunately I left until I could check the essays but they appreciated seeing some common mistakes on the board. I should have done that sooner. It was effective in that we looked for the mistake together.

No survey was issued. I left in the middle of this program. Having spoken to the JT most students completed an essay and perhaps I can see if they produced a cohesive piece in the future.

Introducing Small Talk

Small talk is fantastic. It helps us to talk more naturally.

Here are today's new small talk styles:

Openings

A: Hey! How's it going?

B: I'm good thank you, and you?

A: I'm fantastic, so.... **(Topic/Question)**

A: Hey. What's up?

B: I'm great thank you, and you?

A: I'm very good, so.... **(Topic/Question)**

Closings

A: Thank you. It was nice talking to you.

B: Nice talking to you, too.

A: Ok, sorry, I'd better go now.

B: No problem, see you.

A: See you.

Please practice with these questions:

What sport do you like?

What's your favorite TV Drama?

Who is your favorite teacher?

(Or try an original question)

Name:

Class:

Number:

Today's Small Talks: Have you ever?

A: Hey! How's it going?

B: I'm good thank you, and you?

A: I'm fantastic, so have you ever heard of "fair trade"?

B: Yes, I have. It's a charity right?

A: Yes, it is.

B: Thank you. It was nice talking to you.

A: Nice talking to you, too.

A: Hey. What's up?

B: I'm great thank you, and you?

A: I'm very good, so have you ever studied Spanish?

B: No, I haven't, but I've studied English.

A: Really? That's brilliant.

B: Ok, sorry, I'd better go now.

A: No problem, see you.

B: See you.

A: Hey! How's it going?

B: I'm good thank you, and you?

A: I'm really good thank you. I just made cookies. Have you ever made cookies?

B: No, I haven't. Sounds fun.

A: Thank you. It was nice talking to you.

B: Nice talking to you, too.

Name: _____ Class: _____ Number: _____

I am thinking of a handsome teacher.
He is a teacher who teaches English at Sawakami...

Class _____ No. _____ Name _____

Task1

(Example) (Murasaki Shikibu) is the woman who wrote *The Tales of Genji*.

1. (_____) is the interesting singer who sung *Poker Face*.
2. (_____) is the fantastic Japanese tennis player who played in the US open final in 2014.
3. (_____) is the famous singer who wrote *Imagine*.
4. (_____) is the young TV actress who starred in *Ashita Mama ga inai*.
5. (_____) is the Jamaican who ran really fast in the 2012 Olympic Games.
6. (_____) is the brilliant Japanese author who wrote *Kitchen*.
7. (_____) is the first black baseball player who played in the MLB.
8. (_____) is the woman who helped poor people in India.

Task 2

(Example) S1: I am thinking of a man. This is the man who plays soccer in Spain.
He is Portuguese and plays for Real Madrid.
Who is he?

S2: Is he Ronaldo? S1: That's right.

(1) _____

(2) _____

(3) _____

(4) _____

(5) _____