

Developing Communicative Competence and Learner Autonomy Through Recursive Conversations and Classroom Feedback

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1. Course Characteristics

Level: 1st year university English majors

Class size: Three learners per teacher

Class length: 45 minutes

Textbook: POWER-UP DIALOGUE II

Course Goals: As stated in the Power-Up Tutorial course description, the course goals are:

1. Learn to communicate in English with confidence.
2. Use English in everyday conversation with peers.
3. Discuss world issues and culture.

Figure 1: A typical PUT booth.



2. Issues:

Proficiency: Some learners have experience living in an English-speaking environment, so are significantly more competent oral communicators than their peers. Based on previous experience of the program and the results from questionnaires in the first semester, I believe that these returnee learners are at a higher risk of losing motivation, as they feel that there is nothing for them to learn from PUT classes. On the other hand, there are a significant number of learners at a lower level of proficiency who may be demotivated by classes that are too difficult. How can I make PUT classes useful and interesting for learners of various proficiencies?

Learner beliefs: There are noticeable differences in the expectations that learners bring to the class. Some learners appear to be more aware of useful learning strategies, so will be very active and independent in class. Other learners seem to be more comfortable taking a passive role and expect to be spoon-fed by the tutor. This may be related to level differences, personality, education experiences, or any of a variety of other factors. Can I encourage positive learning beliefs and behavior through the use of an environment and activities that encourage learner autonomy and personal connections?

Personality: The Let's Talk ten-minute conversation at the end of the class can be hit or miss. When learners feel comfortable and capable, they will easily talk for the allotted time and actively practice using conversation skills. However, when learners are shy or feel incompetent, the activity can be unsuccessful and appears to be quite stressful for the learners. This problem can be exacerbated by the three-learner group, where quieter learners can be dominated by louder ones. How can I scaffold PUT activities to allow quieter learners to flourish?

Depth: Upon observing my classes, my advisors commented that my lessons contained too many different activities, causing learning to be rather shallow and making it difficult for lower proficiency learners to engage in the class. In order to rectify this issue, I will need to reduce the number of activities while maintaining the key lesson components of allowing learners to practice conversation skills and improve their fluency.

3. Action Research Goals and Objectives:

Due to the new Power-Up Dialogue 2 textbook which was used for the second semester of this year, the constraints were a little different to the first semester. The main difference is that the Let's Talk was no longer every week, as the new book rotates Let's Talk with Let's Discuss, a group debating activity. In order for experimental changes to be consistent week-to-week, they must be compatible with both the Let's Talk and Let's Discuss. Based on this and the issues already expounded upon, there are two main action research goals that I would like to address:

1. Increase learner engagement in PUT classes and the learning process.
2. Provide learners with deeper, more meaningful conversation practice opportunities.

4. Procedures:

Based on the two main goals of this action research and the issues discussed, the following three procedures were enacted in the second semester:

- A) Change learner groups every three weeks.
- B) Use recursive five-minute group conversations for the Let's Talk and Let's Discuss activities.
- C) Provide learners with rubric-based feedback for their Let's Talk and Let's Discuss performance.

Although keeping groups together for three weeks met with mixed results in the first semester, I believe that the change has the potential to be highly useful for the learners. Therefore, I decided to continue with this as one of my main goals and try it with a much larger, more diverse group of learners, as other PUT teachers felt that the change would be more effective with a large group of learners who are not already familiar with each other. For this reason, I pursued this goal with the English department, as opposed to the small, personal English Education department from semester one.

During one of our action research meetings, my fellow teachers expressed dissatisfaction with my learner feedback system, as I did not have a rubric and was therefore likely giving inconsistent and difficult to follow feedback to my learners. In order to combat this, I changed to using a performance-based rubric in order to provide learners with reliable, meaningful feedback that they can better use to improve their learning.

Learners enjoyed the three-minute recursive conversations in the first semester, but they and I both felt that three minutes was too short a time and restricted the depth of conversation. Another issue was that learners seem to enjoy group conversations, resulting in many of them displaying dissatisfaction with the lack of group activities in my altered first-semester classes. For these reasons, I changed the recursion to make it longer and group-based.

5. Data Gathering and Research Schedule:

In order to collect a mixture of data types and combine them in to a cohesive whole, I followed a concurrent, multiple-perspective triangulation design based on the Introduction to Action Research handout from the first semester, as described in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Data Types Utilized in this Action Research Project.

Quantitative Data	Qualitative Data
Pre-questionnaire	Pre-questionnaire
Post-questionnaire	Post-questionnaire
Transcription Analysis	Learner Feedback

In my mid-semester report, I stated some problems related to the types of data that I had collected and their limitations in helping me to answer my action research goals. Chief among these issues was an over-reliance on learner and teacher opinions, making it difficult to draw meaningful conclusions from the often conflicting and hazy data that I had collected. The other main problem was that all of my data was of a similar type, with the result that I was only able to examine learner and teacher beliefs and not the ‘hard’ data of what had really happened in the classroom. In order to combat these problems, I diversified my data collection types by adding transcription analysis, in the hope that this data will allow me to examine more clearly the impacts of the changes that I made in my classes.

In order to allow time for the collection and analysis of the transcription data, I decided to remove learner interviews and focus groups from my data gathering. I made this decision based on my experiences with the data last year, where the interviews and focus group did not add significantly to the data that I gathered from the questionnaires. To compensate for this loss of potentially insightful qualitative data, I added several qualitative sections to the questionnaires, in order to collect better quality data overall.

Figure 3: Research Schedule

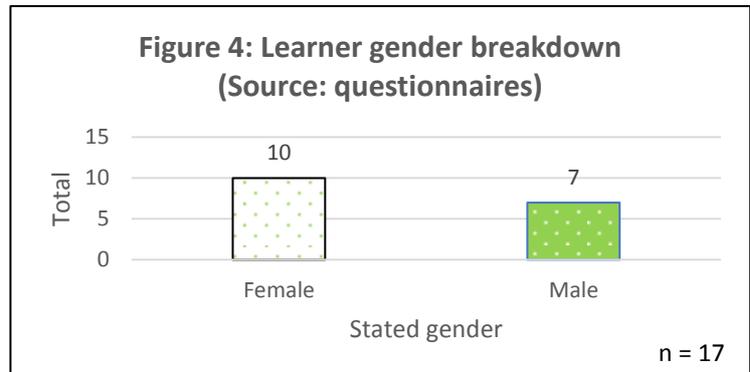
Week	Questionnaire	Video Recording	Learner Feedback
3	X Pre		
4		X	
5		X	
6		X	
7		X	
8		X	
9	X Post	X	
10			X
11			X

During the first two weeks of the semester I was absent due to out-of-work commitments, meaning that I could not begin the action research until week three. There were also constraints related to teachers wishing to make as few changes as possible to the current PUT course, so I conducted all of my changes and video recordings with a small group of eighteen students and six teachers. During this six-week period I conducted both the three-week groups and five-minute recursive conversations simultaneously, with participating learners engaging in both the recursive and non-recursive conversations in order to allow them to compare their experiences. This trial period was then followed up with an exploration of the use of rubric-based teacher feedback in weeks ten and eleven. I also asked the learners to complete a pre- and post- questionnaire in weeks three and nine, in order to gauge changes in their perceptions of the changes that I made to their PUT classes, namely three-week groups and recursive conversations, and to gain useful information about their personal histories and the class composition. To ensure learner understanding of the questions, the questionnaires were created in English, then translated in to Japanese before being administered.

Results and Analysis

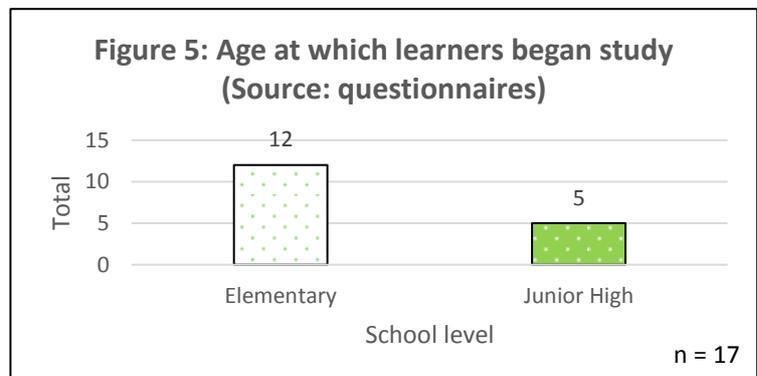
1. Questionnaires

Gender: Of the seventeen learners to complete the questionnaire (one was absent through illness) ten classed themselves as female, seven as male, none as other. This imbalance meant that some classes were female-dominated and it would be interesting to see whether or not this dynamic had an effect on learner perceptions of the experiment. It is also interesting to note that this is a smaller imbalance than the class as a whole, where twenty-three of the thirty-three learners, just over two thirds who completed the pre-questionnaire, classed themselves as female.



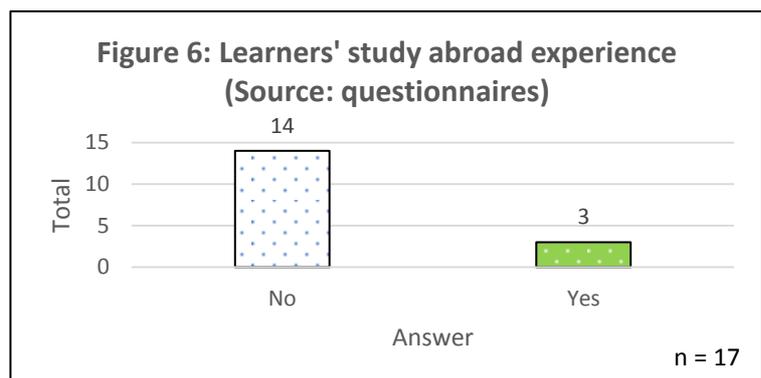
Age at which learners began to study

English: Twelve of the seventeen began studying during elementary school, while a further five did not begin until junior high school. Learners who began to study English in the first year of elementary school would have had a full five years more experience with the language than the learners who began in junior high school. It's possible that this would affect the group dynamic, particularly as PUT does not stream learners of different proficiencies. I wonder if the JHS group might have benefitted more from my changes to PUT, in particular the recursion and its increased focus on similar conversations.

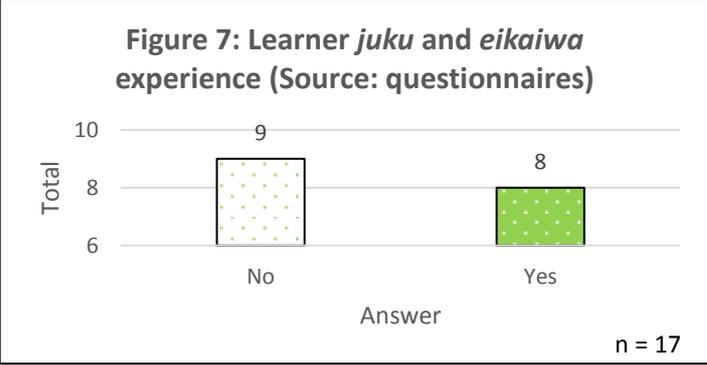


Learner experience living and studying

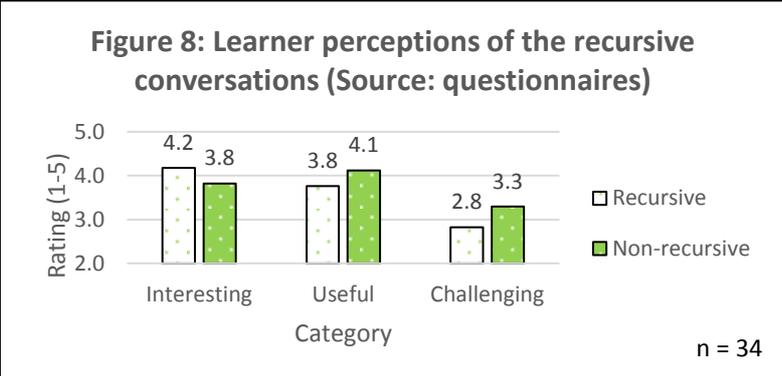
abroad: Three of the learners have lived abroad at some point during their lives, for an average of three years. A further two learners have studied abroad, both for three months. When combined with the age of beginning study data, it can be seen that there is a significant amount of variation when it comes to learners' experiences of English. Consequently, it seems likely that their proficiency and motivations are also quite broad, meaning that PUT classes need to be highly flexible and learner-centered in order to provide all learners with a positive, useful learning experience.



Learner *juku* and *eikaiwa* experience: Eight of the seventeen learners stated *eikaiwa* or *juku* experience, with an average attendance of four years. This contrasts with the other nine learners, who have no such experience and may therefore be approaching PUT classes from a lower level of proficiency. In particular, learners with *eikaiwa* experience may benefit from already having a significant amount of experience using English orally for communicative purposes.

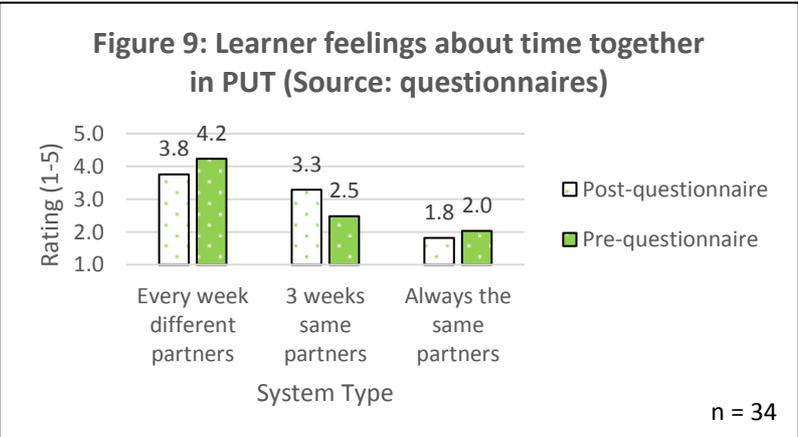


Learner perceptions of the recursive conversations: The original Let’s Talk/Discuss usually consists of a ten-minute, three-learner conversation conducted at the end of the class as a kind of formative goal for learners to aim towards. The new version conducted during this action research consists of two five-minute, three-person conversations, with learners moving between booths in order to add a recursive element. These differences resulted in some very interesting differences in the way that learners answered questions related to the two versions.



As can be seen in figure eight, the new version was rated as more interesting, less useful and less challenging than the original. The changes to the interesting and challenging categories are exactly as hoped-for, however the perception that the original version is more useful is somewhat surprising. I wonder if the decreased difficulty is what caused learners to consider the original to be more useful, or if there are other contributing factors. Overall, it’s pleasing to see that learners found the new Let’s Talk/Discuss to be more interesting and less challenging, even at the expense of a decreased perception of usefulness. It would be very interesting to combine this recursive Let’s Talk/Discuss style with teacher feedback, as was provided in subsequent classes. I suspect that this would have led to learners rating the new activity as better across the board, including usefulness.

Learner feelings about being with the same learners: As with the pre-questionnaire, learners considered having different partners every week to be the optimum situation on average, scoring it almost four out of five. The idea of having the same group for three weeks came in a close second, with a rating of three-point-three out of five, while the idea of having the same partners for the entire year scored less than two out of five.



Although the order of preference is the same as the pre-questionnaire, this doesn’t really tell the whole story. In the pre-questionnaire, learners considered changing groups every week to be far better than

the other two choices, rating it over four out of five, with the other choices scoring less than three. However, after six weeks of trying the three-week style, it was rated almost as highly as changing every week, while the idea of changing every week fell to a lower score, as can be seen in the figure nine. This is highly significant, as just six weeks of the new system was enough to effect a huge change in learner beliefs about what works best for them, and begs the question: what would happen were the experiment to be continued for an entire semester? Based on the pattern displayed in questionnaire answers from both this semester and last semester, I think the three-week rotation can reasonably be assumed to have been successful, but a longer study is necessary in order to provide a definitive answer.

Questionnaires summary: As expected based on the questionnaire data from the previous semester, the English department classes contain a diverse range of learners with different life experiences, education experiences and motivations. On average, learners preferred the new, recursive Let’s Talk and Let’s Discuss conversations, rating them as more interesting and less challenging, a sure sign that the recursive conversations appeal to a wider range of learners than the non-recursive ones. However, the fact that the recursive conversations were rated as less useful indicates that more care needs to be taken to educate learners on the benefits of any new techniques that are being introduced to the classroom.

Regarding the issue of how long to keep one group of learners and their teacher together, this semester’s questionnaires ran in to the same issue as those in the previous semester. Namely, that although the answers showed an overall shift in beliefs away from wanting to change every week and toward appreciating the benefits of being together for longer, the results are not conclusive. While approval ratings for changing every week decreased and ratings those for staying together for three weeks increased, changing every week remained the highest rated of the two at the end of the six week trial period. As with the previous semester’s results, it seems likely that were the trial period to increase, the learners would eventually begin to see changing groups every three weeks as more beneficial than changing every week. Certainly, feedback from other teachers was highly positive and several teachers expressed the desire to continue the system.

2. Transcriptions

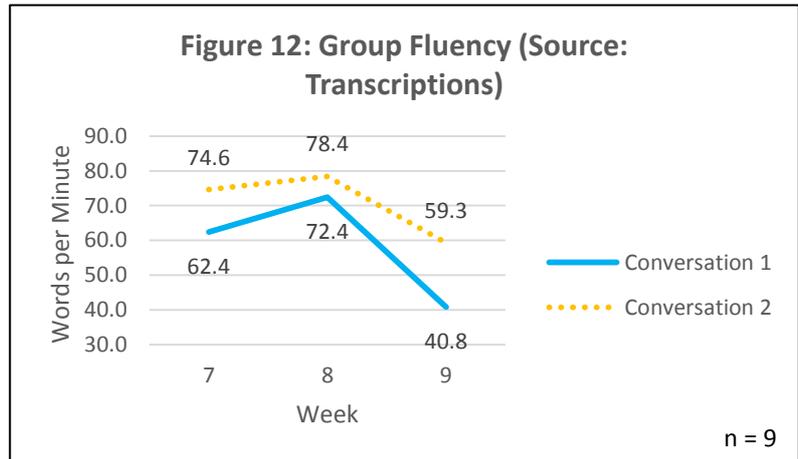
In order to gauge the effect of recursive conversations on learner fluency and conversation complexity, I recorded learners’ recursive conversations in my booth for the six weeks of the experiment, and also within Jessica and Richard’s booths. Because video data was being collected for both my booth (recursion) and Jessica and Richard’s booths (no recursion), I hoped that this would allow me to compare the data for the recursion and non-recursion groups. Unfortunately, due to problems with the data collection process, this was not possible. However, sufficient quality video data was available from my booth during weeks seven, eight and nine in order to allow me to examine the effects of recursive conversations. The majority of the data from the non-recursive conversation booths was of insufficient quality to allow for the transcription of learner speech, so I have not included it in this report.

Group Fluency: In order to gauge the effect of recursive conversations in my booth on learner fluency, I counted the total number of recognizable words in the conversations, then divided that by the total conversation time, arriving at an average number of words per minute score. By charting the difference between the average number of words per minute (WPM) for conversations one and two during weeks seven through nine, it was possible to compare and contrast the difference.

Figure 11: Group Fluency (Source: Transcriptions), n=9

	Week 7	Week 8	Week 9	Average	SD
WPM C1	62.4	72.4	40.8	58.5	16.2
WPM C2	74.6	78.4	59.3	70.8	10.1

In the graph above, a stark difference is visible between the WPM of the first and second conversations for all three weeks. All three weeks display an increase in WPM during the second conversation in comparison to the first. The degree of difference varies, with a relatively small increase of 6 WPM between C1 and C2 in week eight, and a relatively large increase of 18.5 WPM in week nine. On average learner groups spoke 58.5 WPM in C1 compared with 70.8 WPM in C2, an average increase of 12.3 WPM. When one considers that the learners changed booths for C2, it is quite surprising that the results are so strong and unequivocal. Recursive conversations clearly have a significant positive impact on learner fluency. Given that such a profound increase in WPM was observable from just two recursive conversations, it would be interesting to see if a third recursion also results in a significant uptick in learner fluency.



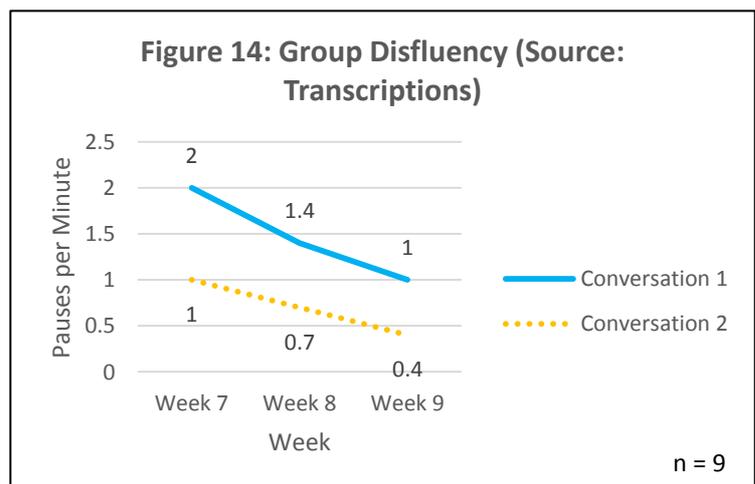
The standard deviation also provides some interesting information about fluency changes between the first and second conversations. Whereas C1 has a standard deviation of 16.2 WPM, C2 shows a significantly lower standard deviation of 10.1 WPM. Whereas the C1 speaking speed varies quite a lot, the C2 speeds are much closer together, indicating that the speaking speed in the second conversations is approaching the learners' maximum fluency. On this note, I wonder if around 80 WPM represents an upper limit on learner words per minute for learners of their proficiency? Also, would a third recursion, or C3, show a further reduction in standard deviation?

Group Disfluency: While fluency is undoubtedly a vital marker of learner oral proficiency, so too can disfluency be considered to be an extremely important component of learner language.

Although measuring fluency can provide us with data on the speaking speed of learners, it sheds little light on the quality of the conversation. For this, it's necessary to look at disfluency markers, and also complexity, which will be discussed in the next section. When examining disfluency, there are several potential markers that can be examined. However, for this Action Research I decided to focus on the one that is most visible in the PUT classroom: pauses of longer than one second.

Figure 13: Group Disfluency (Source: Transcriptions), n= 9

	Week 7	Week 8	Week 9	Average	SD
PPM C1	2	1.4	1	1.5	0.5
PPM C2	1	0.7	0.4	0.7	0.3



In the first conversations for weeks seven, eight and nine, the groups paused between one and two times per minute (PPM). However, in the second conversations, the number of pauses encountered per minute was halved for all three weeks. This shows that the learners required a significant amount of time to generate their thoughts and sentences when conducting conversations for the first time, but that this became less of an issue during the second conversation. This reduction in pauses during conversation may well be the factor that allowed the learners to increase their fluency so much between C1 and C2. As with fluency, it would be a fascinating journey to

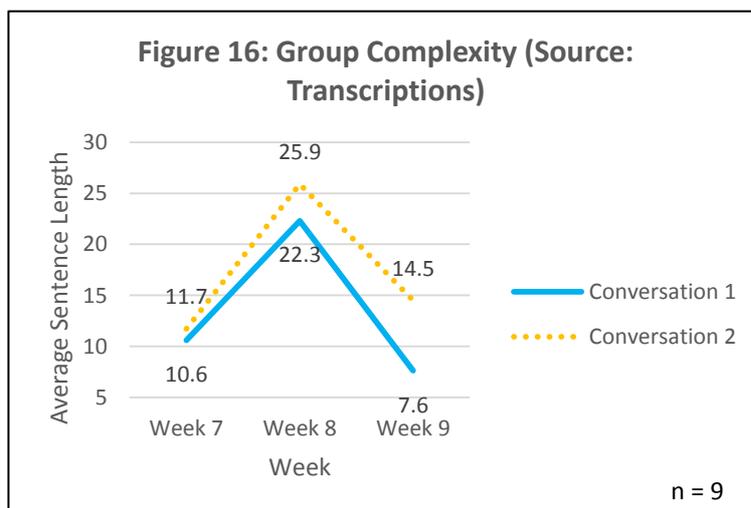
examine what happens when learners engage in a third recursion and whether a similar reduction in disfluency markers would be encountered.

Complexity: As with disfluency, there are many potential markers that can be used to examine conversational complexity. Initially, I decided to examine turn-taking on the recommendation of our AR advisors. Surprisingly, turn-taking did not provide a lot of new information, so I decided to dig down a little deeper by calculating the average length of utterance during C1 and C2. This data provided another intriguing angle for examining the changes in learner conversations, and matched well with the fluency and disfluency analyses.

Looking at the statements per minute (SPM) and questions per minute (QPM) in the table, there is a surprising level of consistency between the first and second conversations for all three weeks. The average SPM for C2 is almost the same as that for C1, while the standard deviation is significantly higher. This indicates that the number of statements varied more for the second conversations, while the average SPM remained virtually identical. A similar story is visible when looking at QPM, with little observable difference between the first and second conversations. After seeing the significant improvements that learners made in terms of fluency and disfluency between the first and second conversations, it was quite surprising that there was effectively no difference in terms of turn-taking; learners used, on average, the same number of statements and questions in the first and second conversations.

Figure 15: Group Complexity (Source: Transcriptions), n=9

	Week 7	Week 8	Week 9	Average	SD
SPM C1	3	2.8	3.4	3.1	0.3
SPM C2	4	2.7	2.4	3.0	0.9
QPM C1	2.8	0.4	2	1.7	1.2
QPM C2	2.4	0.3	1.7	1.5	1.1
WPS C1	10.6	22.3	7.6	13.5	7.8
WPS C2	11.7	25.9	14.5	17.4	7.5



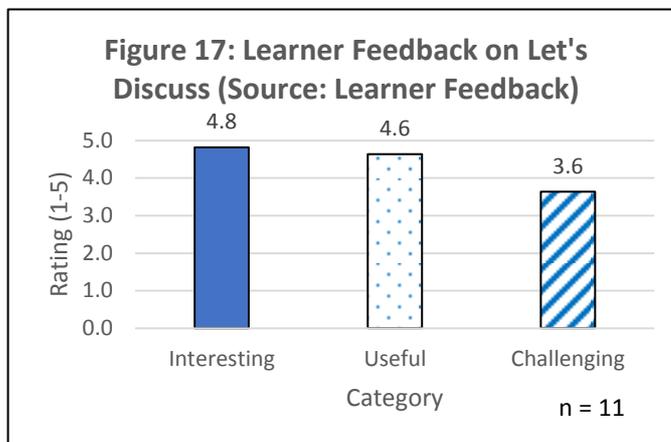
After finding almost no difference between the first and second conversations in terms of turn-taking, I decided to examine length of sentence, as this is another useful indicator of complexity. Although turn-taking remained roughly unchanged through C1 and C2, it can be seen from the chart that sentence length in terms of the number of words (WPS) was consistently higher in the second conversations. The difference was particularly stark during week nine, when average sentence length doubled from seven point six to fourteen point five, an astounding difference. It seems likely that during the first conversations, learners' brains were occupied with organizing their thoughts and language, resulting in lower fluency and complexity. However, during the second conversation learner proficiency increased considerably, so that that they were able to share more ideas and use more complex utterances.

Transcription Analysis Summary: It is clear from the analysis of the transcriptions from weeks seven, eight and nine that recursive conversations provide learners with a useful tool for improving their fluency and increasing their ability to convey more complex ideas using more complex language structures. The transcription data indicates that the first and second conversations play different roles in learner development, with the first conversation helping the learners to arrange their ideas and the second conversation allowing them to speak with increased fluency and clarity of thought. Professor Kindt has

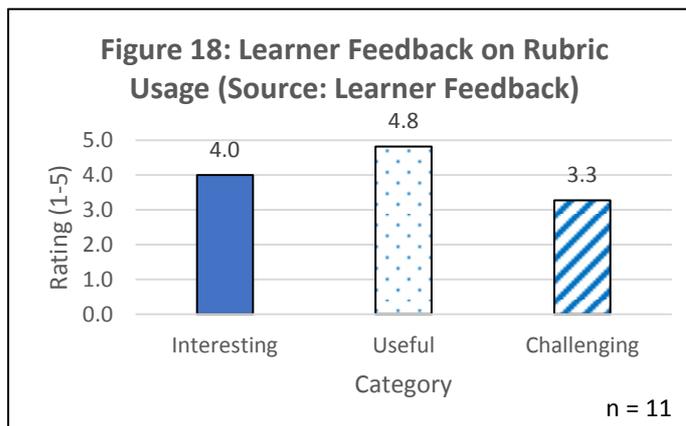
suggested that a third recursive conversation might yield different results again, so I look forward to examining the effects of the third recursion next year.

3. Learner Classroom Feedback

Extended Recursive Let’s Discuss: This activity was an excellent candidate for extension, as it requires the learners to both share their ideas and come up with a new design, both of which take a significant amount of time if they are to be done meaningfully. The learners typically required ten minutes to complete the activity, with those who initially requested less time negotiating for an extra few minutes when the alarm went off. As can be seen from the chart below, the activity was rated very highly by the learners, and was in fact rated both the most interesting and the most challenging of the lesson’s activities. I also felt that this activity allowed me to provide better feedback to the learners, as I had plenty of time to watch and analyze their conversation and to write notes.



Rubric-based Teacher Feedback: Usually I give feedback to learners using the whiteboard. I divide the board in to two halves; on the left side I write down examples of good skill use and interesting points from their conversation, on the right I note down one or two areas for improvement. In week ten I changed the system and used a rubric. This rubric was very useful for the learners but I couldn’t tell whether or not it was an improvement over my whiteboard method. This may be due to the fact that I offered learners the chance to receive feedback either individually or as a group, and all learners preferred the group option. I felt that the holistic nature of the rubric was very useful in showing learners where they had missed out on opportunities to deepen their conversations, for example by sharing their opinions and reasons. The potential drawback was that conversation skill use was marginalized, so I felt that the rubric may have been less useful than the whiteboard method in helping learners to create their class learning goals. As can be seen below, teacher feedback was rated by learners as extremely important, and was in fact rated as the most important part of the lesson. This shows that it’s definitely working, but I think more research is needed in order to shed more light on what kind of feedback is best for the learners.



Learner Feedback Summary: The learner feedback provided more confirmation that the longer recursive conversations are more effective than both the non-recursive version and the short recursive version, as learners rated the extended recursive Let’s Talk as the most interesting and challenging part of the class. The learner feedback also confirmed what had been one of the main requests of learners who participated in my action research during the first semester: learners want and appreciate constructive feedback from their teacher. This desire for useful feedback is, unsurprisingly, universally important to PUT learners and an important part of their learning.

Conclusion

Three-week Groups: In the first semester, I tried to create a more familiar, personal learning environment for the learners in the small English Teaching department program by having them remain together in the same groups of three for three weeks at a time. After gathering the results from pre- and post- questionnaires and learner interviews, I found that despite an improvement in learners' views of the three-week groupings, overall they preferred to continue with the original weekly group changes, despite teacher-taken class observation notes which indicated an increase in learner performance and behavior. On the advice of my fellow PUT teachers, who felt that the three-week groupings would be more successful with a larger, less personal department, I decided to conduct the trial again during the second semester, this time with learners from the much larger English department.

Similarly to the results from the first semester, the pre- and post- questionnaires indicated a significant change in learners' views after experiencing the three-week groups. Where initially, learners had displayed an overwhelming preference for changing groups and teachers every week, after experiencing the three-week groups the questionnaire results showed that learners' views of the three-week groupings had greatly improved, while their opinions of changing groups every week had diminished slightly. Were this improvement to hold-up over the long-term, it would result in learners, on average, favoring the three-week groups after twelve weeks of experience. However, after six weeks of experience the learners, despite their change in views, still displayed a preference for changing groups every week, meaning that the effectiveness and popularity of the three-week groups remains in doubt and in need of further research.

Recursive Conversations: One of the main problems that had been identified with PUT classes was the overly large number of activities reducing the quality of learning in the classroom. In the first semester, I identified the Let's Talk as the main component of the class and decided to improve it by making it a recursive pair conversation with three three-minute conversations, increasing learner talk time and interaction. This change was well received by the learners and my observation data indicated that learners were talking more freely and more equally. However, the observational and interview data, while useful, did not provide conclusive evidence that the recursive conversations were effective and there remained the question of whether or not three minutes was actually a sufficient amount of time in which to conduct a conversation.

In the second semester, I tweaked the recursive conversations by changing them to five-minute group conversations and allowing the learners to change groups for their second conversation. When asked about the change in the questionnaires, learners had extremely interesting responses: on average, they rated the recursive conversations as more interesting, less challenging and less useful than the original ten-minute group conversations. That learners found the recursive conversations to be more interesting and less challenging was excellent to discover, as this indicated that learner engagement had increased, while at the same time the barriers to entry of the conversations had been lowered. It is interesting to note that learners considered the recursive conversations to be less useful, as the transcription analysis data strongly refutes the position. The transcription data shows that recursive conversations have a significant effect on learner fluency, disfluency and conversation complexity. The second recursive conversations were consistently better in terms of all three factors, showing that recursion is an excellent and highly useful method for improving learner conversation proficiency.

Rubric-based Feedback: The learners reserved high praise for the rubric-based feedback, and for feedback from the teacher in general, scoring it an almost-perfect four point eight out of five in usefulness. I provided learners with informal, non-rubric based feedback as well as rubric-based feedback and noticed significant differences between the two. While feedback from the teacher about learner performance was a key feature of learner requests in both the first and second semesters, they did not specify a preference, leaving it up to me to decide. I found that the informal system was highly flexible, allowing me to give learners highly personalized feedback based on my knowledge of the learners and conversation skills, but that I could focus

too heavily on conversation skills, ignoring the broader conversational picture. On the other hand, the rubric-based feedback ensured that I was treating all learners equally and was extremely useful for examining the strengths and weaknesses of the group as a whole, allowing me to provide useful feedback that was at less risk of hurting feelings or making individual learners stand out. Overall, the rubric-based feedback was a definite improvement on the informal system, and with more refining might also be able to incorporate the strengths of both.

Final Thoughts: In the context of my two research goals, I feel that the changes made, particularly those made in the second semester, succeeded in both increasing learner engagement in PUT and in providing them with deeper, more meaningful conversation practices. The recursive conversations made conversations easier to engage and learners also found them to be more interesting than non-recursive conversations. This increased learner engagement was enhanced by the use of a rubric-based feedback, which aided learners in self-evaluating and setting their own learning goals. While I suspect that three-week groups also aided learners by creating a more personal environment, the questionnaire data does not strongly support this and more research is needed. Finally, the recursion and rubric-based feedback were a powerful tool for increasing learner fluency and helping them to order their ideas in to more complex arguments, by allowing them to self-assess and practice in recursive episodes. I hope to further develop utilize these wonderful communicative tools in the following year.

Future Issues and Research

Three-week Groups: While I suspect, based on teachers' observation notes, that three-week groups benefitted learners, the learners themselves did not universally agree with this assessment. However, I think there is enough potential benefit to continue experimenting, so I will continue this attempt at increased personalization next year.

Recursive Conversations: This is clearly a powerful tool for learners that could be made even more impactful than it was over the past two semesters. Next year I will experiment with increasing recursion in the classroom significantly, by having three seven-minute recursive conversations every week and making them the focus of the lesson and incorporating teacher feedback.

Rubric-based Feedback: Also very useful and unanimously loved by the learners, I will expand the use of rubric-based feedback to the entire class, rather than just my own booth. I will also make efforts to integrate the rubric that I used more effectively with the conversation skills that we focus on in PUT and use this new rubric for the basis of a new performance-based grading system, which will replace the current effort-based system that has been used for the past several years.

Lesson Plan: Week 7 – Relationships (Adapted from November AR Report)

Lesson Goals:

- Learners can engage in a five-minute group conversation about relationships, using a variety of conversation skills.
- Learners can use the strategies of using descriptions and using different words in order to negotiate meaning when a partner does not understand an utterance.

Procedure:

Homework check

- Students seem to forget my feedback, so I moved this part of the lesson to the end. I've been doing it for a few weeks now and it seems to be having a positive effect. Students are focusing more on keywords as preparation, instead of relying on reading out long sentences. Consequently, homework scores have also increased on average.

Lesson Goal

- Some students' lesson goals were very vague, so I helped them to make more concrete personal goals. For example, "I want to talk more" became "I will ask three follow-up questions". I've also been providing counting strategies for students so that they can self-assess more accurately. It seems to be working, as students are consistently achieving their goals.

Using Descriptions/Asking the Right Questions

- I added a recursive element to this activity, so we worked in pairs for two minutes at a time. Everyone had two minutes with everyone else, allowing us to practice the skill three times. The first time was usually not so successful, but the second and third times were much better. In fact, many student were able to do all four gifts in just one minute by the third time.

Using Other Words/Wedding Plans

- After comparing homework notes, we spent a few minutes coming up with new words and ways of saying them, such as "zombie day is Halloween". I feel that this maybe helped students with the productive element of the skill.
- I changed the Wedding Plans activity to a recursive pair activity similar to the one above. As with the previous activity, students improved after the first pair, usually becoming much more proficient by the third discussion.

Let's Talk

- I split it into three sections: first group talk, feedback session, third group talk. While students were conducting the first group talk, I made notes on their use of conversation skills and areas for improvement. During the feedback session, I shared this information with the students so that they could focus on improving for the second group talk. Some students actively used my feedback and improved their conversations, so I felt that this was fairly successful.

Lesson Reflection

- Students frequently referred to the feedback session when writing their lesson reflection. A significant number of students stated that they wished to focus on weaknesses that I had identified for their next lesson goal. Other students focused purely on their own personal goal.

Appendix

Appendix 1: Learner Post-Questionnaire

Appendix 2: Feedback Rubric

Name _____ Topic _____
 Class _____

Gen.	1	2	3		Notes
Content Does the student aim for depth in the conversation	Description	Preference Description	Emotion and/or Opinion Preference Description May attempt new vocab.	/3	
Participation Is the student actively participating in the conversation	Only participates when asked a question; is often disengaged	Sometimes participates without being asked a question; rarely uses interjections; is usually engaged	Asks and answers questions for a mostly balanced conversation; uses interjections; is almost always/always engaged	/3	
Understandability What does the student do to ensure communication	Never or rarely attempts to understand or be understood	Sometimes attempts to understand or be understood but may rely on Japanese	Usually attempts to understand or be understood without relying on Japanese	/3	
Strategies Does the student actively/appropriately use strategies in the context of a conversation	Uses no strategies/ rarely uses strategies	Sometimes uses strategies, but does not attempt any target strategies	Attempts target strategies as well as a variety of others depending on the context of the conversation	/3	
Total				/12	

Tutor Initials: _____

Section C: Booth Schedule

This section helps me to understand what you think about the PUT classroom system.

9. Please circle the number that best matches your feelings.

	Strongly disagree	1	2	3	4	Strongly agree
I enjoy having new partners every week.	1	2	3	4	5	
I enjoy having the same partners for 3 weeks.	1	2	3	4	5	
I would like to always have the same partners.	1	2	3	4	5	

Comments:

10. Please circle the number that best matches your feelings.

	Strongly disagree	1	2	3	4	Strongly agree
I enjoy having a new teacher every week.	1	2	3	4	5	
I enjoy having the same teacher for 3 weeks.	1	2	3	4	5	
I would like to always have the same teacher.	1	2	3	4	5	

Comments:

Finally, do you have any more comments or suggestions for improving PUT?

Thank you very much for taking part in this questionnaire to improve PUT; your time and effort are greatly appreciated. I look forward to sharing the results with you and to making this class as useful and enjoyable as possible for NUFS students.

Appendix 3: Learner Feedback Form

Please write the number that best fits your feelings.

- 1 – not at all
- 2 – not very
- 3 -
- 4 – a little
- 5 - very

	Interesting (面白い)	Useful (役に立つ)	Challenging (難しい)
Lesson Goal			
Review			
Reading			
Follow-up Discussion			
Sales Discussion			
Let's Discuss			
Let's Discuss Feedback			
Lesson Reflection			

Comments:
