Final Action Research Report – March 2016
Name: Seth Wallace

Title
Bridging gaps of culture and level through communicative language teaching.

Theme of this year’s AR:
How can we integrate mixed ages, levels and nationalities in the classroom? How can we encourage negotiation for meaning in preparation and improve attitudes to and results in productive tasks? How can we create a context for cultural sharing and rapport building?

Teaching Context

Semester I:
1) Level: 1st Year University Students
2) Class size: 24
3) Time: 90 minutes, once weekly
4) Nationalities: 9 Nepalese, 8 Japanese, 6 Chinese, 1 Vietnamese
5) Levels: 7 beginners, 17 inter/adv.
6) Ages: 19-46
7) Text books: Beginners – English Conversation Curriculum (S.Wallace)
   Inter/adv. - Tools for Increasing Proficiency in Speaking 1 (Prof. Duane Kindt)

Semester II:
1) Level: 1st – 3rd Year University Students
2) Class size: 6
3) Time: 90 minutes, once weekly
4) Nationalities: 4 Japanese, 1 Chinese, 1 Vietnamese
5) Levels: 3 beginners, 3 inter.
6) Ages: 22-62
7) Text book: WorldView 1 (Pearson ESL)

Course Goals and Objectives:
To encourage students to hold a 2.5-minute timed conversation.
To encourage the higher-level students to help the lower students negotiate for meaning.
To encourage students to be aware of conversation strategies and to use them in interactions.
To encourage cultural sharing and the establishment of rapport between students.
To encourage lower-level students to take the lead as much as possible in classroom discussions, then offer them the chance for higher-quality production in written homework task.

**Problems** (Both groups were from the same university)
The main issue in the spring semester was how to deal with the gross divergence in level. At least 2 students couldn't read the roman alphabet whilst a group of around 10 were expert speakers of English. It then became a question of how to integrate their efforts both in classroom tasks and for assessment.
In the fall semester, the key issue was how to encourage output, especially the quality and quantity of spoken English.
With vastly different learner profiles, motivations and levels, how could output be shared between the speakers for learning and assessment?

**What I did**
I developed interesting and personalized materials to complement the textbook unit topics in order to motivate students and focus them on communicative speaking activities.
I introduced conversational strategies such as openers, closers, shadowing and clarification techniques to encourage student output and confidence using spoken English.
I used a variety of materials such as audiovisual, printed hand-outs, and supplementary textbooks in order to raise student interest and noticing.
I developed a positive learning environment, encouraging students to share cultural elements with each other and be inquisitive about the origin of their classmates as well as their contrasting reasons for learning English.
I developed timed conversations, changing partners in order to lengthen and deepen the interactions.
I implemented speaking tests as both mid-term and end of term assessments in the second semester in order to focus students on conversation strategy usage and encourage output.
I introduced the students to peer assessment, modeled feedback and exemplified comments after the mid-term speaking test. They agreed to share their work between them so I photocopied and distributed a copy of each student's work to each class member. This prepared them for the feedback and allowed them to follow the conversation more easily in review. Further, it constituted listening and reading practice and developed confidence.
I modified the peer feedback categories between the mid-term and final speaking tests. I also clarified, exemplified and modeled the new categories with a focus on conversation strategies, rapport building during the discussion and constructing a successful conversation.
We focused on conversation breakdown, how to avoid it and how to prevent it.
I provided an extended feedback session after the midterm recorded speaking test in order to guarantee student noticing of the positive effects of conversation strategy use. This included analysis of the recordings of the speaking tests and clarification of the elements of a successful conversation. We compared and contrasted both pairs’ conversations, exemplifying positive elements and evaluating the relative success of each.

I reduced the number of questions for the final speaking test.
I provided students with a description of the final speaking test, along with the topic a week before the speaking test.
I provided students with a rubric a week prior to the final speaking test in order to give them a clear idea of expectations for assessment.
The rubric (kindly recommended by Professor Sato) is weighted heavily to encourage fluency and content.
I introduced the students to peer assessment, modeled feedback and exemplified comments after the mid-term speaking test.
I modified the peer feedback categories between the mid-term and final speaking tests. I also clarified, exemplified and modeled the new categories with a focus on conversation strategies, rapport building during the discussion and constructing a successful conversation.
We focused on conversation breakdown, how to avoid it and how to construct smooth unscripted communication with a focus on fluency.

Inclusions:
Class work samples from mid-term and final speaking tests.

(i) Mid-term speaking test class interview sheets
(ii) Mid-term peer speaking test feedback sheets
(iii) Final speaking test description, rubric and class interview sheets - unfilled
(iv) Final speaking test class feedback sheets
**Interview Questions**

**ABU Eikahwa 2 – Half-term test**  
**Week 8 11/19**  
**Student A**

1. What's your name?  
2. How many books do you have in your family?  
3. Do you use the Internet?  
4. Do you listen to music on the Internet?  
5. Do you like books on the Internet?  
6. What kind of music do you like?  
7. What's your favorite fruit?  

**Student B**

1. What's your name?  
2. Where do you live?  
3. What do you read?  
4. What do you use the Internet?  
5. Do you buy books in person?  
6. Do you listen to music?  
7. Do you get your news from TV?  

**Student C**

1. What's your name?  
2. Do you use the Internet?  
3. Do you think by book on the Internet?  
4. Do you listen to music on the Internet?  
5. What kind of music do you listen to?  
6. How often do you use the Internet?  
7. What kind of music do you like?  

**Student D**

1. What's your name?  
2. How much do you read?  
3. Do you use the Internet?  
4. Do you buy books?  
5. Where do you go to shop?  
6. Do you listen to music?  
7. Do you get your news from TV?  
8. What do you research information on the Internet?  

**NB**: Only correct if risk of communication breakdown.
## Peer Feedback

### Student A

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- J: is good at speaking English. He used to speak English in class.
- C: He speaks clearly and fluently.
- K: Sometimes he seems a little uninterested.

### Student B

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- C: 0
- T: numbers please.
- K: unavailable

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- C: 0
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- K: unavailable

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**Student D**

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I help as much as I can.

I could speak more fluently than the last time.

My head became pure white.

Word isn't understood or forgotten.

**Student A**

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Part 2

I could have been better.

**Student C**

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Part 2

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Part 2

I could have been better.

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Part 2

I could have been better.

more friendly

more talkative

more consistent
Contrast between mid-term and final speaking tests
Results

- Students noticed the elements needed for a successful conversation. They became motivated to produce a longer and more enjoyable interaction.
- Students understood conversation breakdown and noticed the value of conversation breakdown in avoiding this.
- Students became more confident between the mid-term and final speaking test, using more strategies and a kinder tone.
- Students negotiated successfully for meaning in preparing the speaking tests. The more advanced students became used to helping the lower levels to express their opinions and this was borne through in the final speaking test with conversation strategies.
- The final speaking test, although based on notes was mostly ad-libbed. Indeed, the second pair spoke for almost 17 minutes!! The mixed nationalities were very comfortable together and did very well to share their cultural stance and point of view in English. I gave less input on content and more on strategies. The students performed wonderfully and they were very satisfied to have done so.

Lesson Plan – Week 14
Name: Seth Wallace

Lesson: Planning, performing and recursive practice of an opinion-bearing conversation on the subject of travel (in groups vs individual).

1. Level: 1st – 3rd Year University Students

2. Class Size and make up: 6 (3 beginners, 3 intermediate)
   (4 Japanese, 1 Chinese, 1 Vietnamese), Ages 22-62

3. Textbook: WorldView 1 (1 unit per koma) (Unit 26 North and South)

4. Class Details: 90 minutes, once a week

5. Course Goals and Objectives:
   - To encourage students to hold a 2.5-minute timed conversation.
   - To encourage the higher-level students to help the lower students negotiate for meaning.
   - To encourage students to be aware of conversation strategies and to use them in interactions.
   - To encourage cultural sharing and the establishment of rapport between students.
• To encourage lower-level students to take the lead as much as possible in classroom discussions, then offer them the chance for higher-quality production in written homework task.

6. **Class Context:**
   A more manageable sized group this semester. The student levels and age group are widely mixed.

7. **Today’s Goal:**
   • Speaking. To encourage lower-level students to take the lead in classroom discussions.
   • Writing. To encourage analysis and autonomous learner investigation into the topic of solo vs group travel, synthesized in written output.
   • Negotiation for meaning across different levels. Encourage higher level students to enable lower levels to produce more spoken output.

8. **Class Context:**
   A small group this semester. Student levels and ages are widely mixed.

9. **Today's lesson plan**
   I. Housekeeping. Introduction of topic. Structured input story – Seth’s trip to Europe with his in-laws.
   II. Student mind map. T elicits terms relating to the opinion “Travel – as a group or alone” adding related terms. Students note down filled out mind map on sheet. Pre-teach vocab for input.
   III. Teacher makes a short structured input talk about solo travel vs group travel. Students make notes, add to mind map.
   IV. T feeds back from students, completes and shows mind map on the board.
   V. Students brainstorm vocabulary, share on board, note down.
   VII. Selection of pairs for first conversation, mixing of pairs for conversation practice (Travelling – as a group or alone? worksheet).
   VIII. Students write their opinion, assess and state 5 reasons for their opinion, then have a timed conversation with two class members, adding strategies. They may adopt questions they find good. Pairing: lower students with higher but lower students are encouraged to state all 5 reasons, higher only 3. Higher
   IX. Pairs are changed, process repeated. Higher students are encouraged to help the lower students state their 5 reasons in pair conversation.
   X. Strategies are reviewed. Adjustments to notes are made as necessary.
   XI. Students return to their original pair for the final timed conversation of 2-2.5 minutes.
   XII. Students then write their fuller opinion as written homework.
XIII. Homework is graded for the course.

10. What happened
(1) Of the 4 students present, both pairs were able to hold a 2-minute conversation with some grammatical errors.
(2) The higher-level students sought to enable the lower-level students, offering strategies when conversation breakdown looked likely.
(3) The lower level students in each pair were able to contribute more to both classroom discussions and written homework output activities.
(4) Students exchanged original and pooled examples of good travel options in pair conversation with reasons to support these options. They improved the quality and quantity of output through recursive practice.

11. What I might change in future
(1) Give students more time to interpret the structured input.
(2) Provide students with a written copy of the structured input text in order to cater to visual learners.
(3) Develop the mind map into a model conversation which I would write out on the board. Have students provide one part including strategies detailed.
(4) Demonstrate the model conversation.
(5) Provide the beginner students with extra conversation strategies in the model conversation.
(6) Give students more time to practice with more conversation partners.

12. Inclusions
(i) Student class work samples of the worksheet/preparation for the 2.5 minute timed conversation.
(ii) Student written samples from the homework opinion section
CA - Student 1

Travelling – as a group or alone?

Opinion: It is better to travel in a group.

Step 1: Brainstorming

It's easier to solve problems.
It's easier to communicate.
It's safer because we can travel together.
We can learn a new language.
We can make new friends.

Step 2: Writing the reasons

1. It's easier to solve problems. (it's safer)
2. It's easier to communicate.
3. It's easier to learn a new language.
4. It's easier to make new friends.
5. It's easier to make new friends.

Step 3: New Vocabulary

- adventure
- responsible
- memory

- Let's talk.
- are you doing?
- good, thank you. And you?
- I'm doing, thanks. And you?
- Yes, I'm doing, thanks.
- We are doing good.
- We are doing well.
- We are doing good.
- We are doing well.

CA - Student 2

Travelling – as a group or alone?

Opinion: It is better to travel in a group.

Step 1: Brainstorming

It's easier to solve problems.
It's easier to communicate.
It's safer because we can travel together.

Step 2: Writing the reasons

1. It's easier to solve problems.
2. It's easier to communicate.
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Student 2

Travelling – as a group or alone?

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- We are doing well.

Final Step – Express your opinions

I think that group travel is better because it's easy to make friends because we can see new things together and don't get lonely. But I choose to travel alone. There are 4 reasons.

Firstly, I can choose how to use my time because I can make my own plans.

Secondly, our perspective is more likely to change because we can contact with foreigners directly.

Thirdly, it's easier to change our itinerary, so we can go anywhere and anytime by ourselves.

Lastly, we can enjoy the best travel because I think it adventurous for us to go alone.